

The Honorable Robert Scott
Chair
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2022

Dear Chairs Murray and Scott and Ranking Members Burr and Foxx:

The 38 undersigned organizations are grateful for Congress' attention to youth mental health and wellness in our country. We recognize the enormous challenges that our country is grappling with and that you are leading on. As Congress continues its efforts, through this difficult time, to support youth safety and wellbeing, we strongly encourage you to prioritize access to primary prevention for all young people across a full continuum of support.

The youth mental health crisis

Federal mental health and wellness efforts must ensure that young people have access to research- and evidence-based primary prevention that mitigates risk factors and promotes protective factors to prevent mental health challenges from manifesting into emergent situations across a full continuum of support. Focusing on prevention will help (1) mitigate the [social and economic impacts that happen at higher levels of care](#) and (2) reduce the strain on the mental health workforce, especially in the face of a [mental health workforce shortage and burn-out](#). Focusing on prevention further responds to the fact that not all young people will work with a mental health professional, though we know [young people are currently under significant stress and mental health challenges](#).

Why primary prevention

Primary prevention includes helping all young people develop personal and interpersonal life skills such as building relationships, coping with stress and adversity, managing emotions, and problem-solving. Research- and evidence-based programs and services that build these life skills have been shown to reduce symptoms of [externalizing challenges](#), such as aggression and bullying, as well as [internalizing challenges](#), such as anxiety and depression. Building life skills also promotes resilience and well-being and can lead to improved [school success and college and career readiness](#).

[A vast majority of parents](#) support teaching these skills in schools – this has been particularly important since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How primary prevention works

In a continuum of comprehensive support in a school setting, primary prevention, or tier one in a multi-tiered system, includes programs and services that are provided to all students through prevention-based activities that foster healthy behavior and generate a safe and supportive school climate. Programs and services in a multi-tiered framework should be research- and evidence-based and developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for students' needs. Teaching these skills will

look different in each school based on the community it serves, specific to each community's needs and priorities. Typically, in the classroom, instruction includes educators:

- Reinforcing personal and interpersonal life skills that start in the home, such as learning how to solve problems, manage emotions, set goals, and get along with others.
- Explaining an essential skills concept using words, pictures, or video. Students then practice the concept in a group discussion, through individual writing tasks, or by working together.
- Reviewing students' understanding of the skills and reinforcing as needed.

Research- and evidence-based primary prevention for young people is conducive to promoting safety and wellness in numerous ways, such as:

- Building skills and protective factors as [a part of comprehensive youth suicide prevention](#) to manage and mitigate feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, substance use, and child sexual abuse – which can each be a risk factor for [youth suicide](#).
- Research-based skill-building also supports prevention of [substance use](#), [bullying](#), and [child sexual abuse](#).
- Primary prevention also plays a role in building a [safe school climate via violence prevention](#).
- Prevention programs and services that are [trauma-informed in schools are also an](#) important offering as young people cope with [trauma connected to the pandemic](#) and recent events of violence in schools and communities.

What we ask

In federal policy that supports youth wellbeing, language should prioritize access to primary prevention programs and services that are research- and evidence-based and a part of a full continuum of support. Terms and definitions for primary prevention programs and services should be consistent to improve clarity and connect initiatives, streamline funding, and promote cross-agency collaboration to support schools and communities to leverage maximum impact and reach for the young people in our country.

Next steps

We are grateful for Congress' bipartisan efforts to strengthen and improve support for the young people in our country, and we strongly encourage you to prioritize access to primary prevention in a full continuum of support, central to youth mental health and wellbeing. Supporting the safety and wellbeing of America's young people is vital for our country's future.

For any questions or to discuss prioritizing primary prevention further, please reach out to Jordan Posamentier, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at Committee for Children (jposamentier@cfchildren.org).

Sincerely,

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Psychological Association

American Psychological Association Services, Inc.

Boys Town

Child Injury Prevention Alliance
Coalition for Community Schools
Committee for Children
Communities In Schools
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
EDGE Consulting Partners
Forefront Suicide Prevention, UW-School of Social Work
Futures Without Violence
Institute for Educational Leadership
Learning Disabilities Association of America
MENTOR National
Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
National PTA
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
Nemours Children's Health
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape
Prevent Child Abuse America
Prevention Institute
Save the Children Action Network
School's Out Washington
Search Institute
Society for Advancement of Violence and Injury Research (SAVIR)

The Family Focused Treatment Association

TNTP

Transforming Education Now

Young Audiences, Inc.

Youth Villages