**EMBARGOED FOR 5 AM ET WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24**

**MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN:   
A CRISIS MADE WORSE BY THE PANDEMIC**

*The Children’s Hospital Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics   
Launch Awareness Campaign on Severity of Crisis*

The Children’s Hospital Association (CHA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), representing the nation’s children’s hospitals and pediatricians, call on Congress and the Biden Administration to prioritize children’s mental, emotional and behavioral health in proposals addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together, these leading pediatric organizations are launching an awareness campaign to highlight the escalating crisis among children and youth and share ideas about what government can do to ensure families have access to services. The campaign features digital advertising in national publications including *The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal* and *Politico*, opinion editorials and educational sessions for policymakers.

CHA and the AAP ask lawmakers and the administration to provide more funds to existing programs under SAMHSA and HRSA that support pediatric mental and behavioral health, including the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program and the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Program for Professionals. In addition, the organizations point out that Congress should provide new funding to support a range of additional activities at the state and local level to support children including telehealth, training for crisis response, primary and emergency mental and behavioral health care, school-based services, outpatient programs and partial hospitalizations.

“Children’s hospitals’ emergency rooms have been inundated with children and youth in severe crisis,” explained Amy Knight, president of CHA. “With nowhere else for families to turn, these kids are great risk. We must do everything we can to help children and families access critical mental health services now.”

The pandemic has exacerbated a troublesome trend. Hospital admissions and emergency room visits for suicide attempts doubled at children’s hospitals from 2008 to 2015. This past summer, as the pandemic raged and social isolation limited access to school, friends and other support systems, hospitalizations at children’s hospitals significantly increased. These included an increase of nearly 20% increase in suicide attempts and more than 40% in disruptive behavior disorders.

“Almost a year into the pandemic, what began as a public health emergency is turning into a mental health crisis among our nation’s children and adolescents,” added Dr. Lee Beers, president of the AAP, medical director of Community Health and Advocacy at Children’s National Hospital and founding director of the DC Mental Health Access in Pediatrics Program. “The duration of the pandemic, isolation from friends and family, effects of parental stress and economic hardship, and loss of loved ones are all taking their toll on children’s mental health. Now is the time for us to step up and invest in a broad-scale, comprehensive approach to prevention, early intervention and treatment.”

Beyond the awareness campaign, CHA and the AAP are working together and with other child health-focused organizations on longer term solutions to better integrate pediatric mental and behavioral health into the health care delivery system.

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The Children’s Hospital Association is the national voice of more than 200 children’s hospitals, advancing child health through innovation in the quality, cost and delivery of care.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.