**PEDiatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) Programs**

**New Federal Funding and Opportunities for State Advocacy**

On March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) was signed into law; among its many important provisions, the ARP provides an additional $80 million to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) program, championed by AAP. As of ARP signing, the PMHCA program enhanced access to child and adolescent mental health care by funding tele-mental health access line programs in 21 states. The additional $80 million provides HRSA the funding to support programs in all remaining states, the District of Columbia (D.C.), and the US territories, and be maintained for the next 5 years.

On May 19, 2021, HRSA released the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for additional state applicants for the program. On August 27, 2021, HRSA announced the first $10.7 million in new ARP PMHCA program funding, which will expand the program from 21 awards in 21 states to 45 awards in 40 states, as well as the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Chickasaw Nation, and the Red Lake Band of the Chippewa Indians.

**About the Program**

The goal of the PMHCA Program is to promote behavioral health integration in pediatric primary care through supporting tele-behavioral health care access. State or regional teams of pediatric mental health experts provide timely telehealth consultation, training, technical assistance, and care coordination for primary care clinicians to diagnose, treat, and refer children and adolescents with behavioral health conditions.

The PMHCA Program is critically important. Nearly 30% of the US population lives in a mental health professional shortage area (MHPSA), and pediatricians are often the first clinicians to be able to treat a child in need of behavioral health care. A recent RAND study demonstrated the critical impact of PMHCA programs, as children living in states with such programs were significantly more likely to receive behavioral health care than children without them. COVID-19 has also exacerbated the need for pediatric mental health services; a recent study showed that pediatric mental health-related emergency department (ED) visits have increased by 24-31% as a proportion of all children's ED visits since the pandemic began. Clinicians and parents report high satisfaction with the PMHCA program.

**State Programs**

As of ARP enactment, HRSA supported PMHCA programs in 21 states: Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Wisconsin. The new August 2021 HRSA funding will support additional programs in California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming, the US Virgin Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Chickasaw Nation, and the Red Lake Band of the Chippewa Indians. More on the status of each state's program can be found at the National Network for Child Psychiatry Access Programs.
Among other activities, HRSA-funded programs are expected to:

- Build a statewide/regional network of pediatric mental health teams;
- Demonstrate strong partnerships with the state's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Title V program (if the Title V program is not the state applicant, a letter of support from Title V agency must be obtained and applicant agency must detail how it will work in collaboration with Title V);
- Develop a telehealth referral database populated with information on community mental health resources;
- Develop statewide/regional partnerships to enhance the provision of behavioral health services via telehealth – including with AAP chapter;
- Create and convene an advisory board comprised of diverse stakeholders;
- Participate in national network of PMCHA programs and engage with PMCHA Innovation Center;
- Create a sustainability plan;
- Collect data and participate in program evaluation; and
- Sustain elements of the project that are effective

HRSA-funded programs must also report annually on a number of performance, outcome, and other measures.

**New Federal Funding**

Section 2712 of the ARP includes $80 million in new federal HRSA funding to support PCMHA programs in the remaining states, D.C., and the territories for 5 years. On May 19, 2021, HRSA announced released the NOFO for this project; up $14 million will be awarded for each of the next 5 years, or up to $445,000/state/year. As a condition of receiving HRSA grant funding, states must match 20% of the total HRSA grant award. The first round of new PCMHA funding was announced on August 27, 2021.

**What AAP Chapters Can Do Now**

If your state has a PCMHA program and your chapter has not yet formalized a relationship, now would be an important time to connect and offer chapter expertise. HRSA-funded PCMHA programs are awarded to states and the lead state agency varies by state—while the applicant agency may be the Title V program in your state, it could be another agency. AAP chapters, especially those in states that were not previously HRSA-funded, should reach out to their awarded state agencies to discuss plans for implementation.

If your state does not yet have a PCMHA program, chapters are encouraged to reach out to your state and other advocates to discuss the status of state plans to create such a program and apply for federal funding. AAP chapters can offer to play a leadership role and provide expert pediatric input into program development. As an example, AAP chapters can offer to have representation serve on the state’s PMCHA Program advisory board.

**More Info from HRSA**

Additional information from HRSA is available on the HRSA PCMHA website.

**We’re Here to Help**

AAP is here to support AAP chapters in efforts to create, sustain, and strengthen PCMHA programs across the country—please contact AAP State Advocacy for targeted consultation.

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