

# ACT Conference 2020: Mental Health Advocacy/Coalitions



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## California's Children are in a Mental Health Crisis:

Source: California Children's Trust



**Increase in inpatient visits for suicide, suicidal ideation and self injury** for children ages 1-17 years old, and 151% increase for children ages 10-14



**Increase in mental health hospital days** for children between 2006 and 2014



**Increase in the rate of self-reported mental health needs** since 2005



**California ranks low in the country** for providing behavioral, social and development screenings that are key to identifying early signs of challenges

# The Pediatric Mental Health Crisis

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**Mental health and substance use** disorders are the leading causes of disease burden in the U.S.



37% of students with **mental illness age 14 and older, dropout of school**—the highest dropout rate of any disability group



**Untreated behavioral health needs** can lead to lifelong challenges in social and emotional development, academic achievement, and physical health

The price is higher for black and brown children, they receive the wrong services at the wrong time:

81%

81% of children on medicaid are **black or brown**.

2x

The **suicide rate for black children**, aged 5-12 is 2x that of their white peers.

70%

70% of youth in California's juvenile justice system have **unmet behavioral health needs**, and youth of color are over-represented in the system.

With the onset of COVID-19, families and children have been separated from many fundamental communities of support including schools and child-care programs. Families face economic uncertainties and isolation, along with fears of threatens to social structures.

## The Access Gap

Over 50% of California's children are covered by Medi-Cal and EPSDT entitlement

The access rate is down to 5%

Needs are increasing with COVID-19



What can we do?

How do we make  
a difference?

“Alone we can do so little;  
Together we can do so  
much.”  
- Helen Keller

# Coalitions: An Effective Strategy for Change

A group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal.

# Why start a coalition?

Pool	Pool resources
Develop	Develop political clout
Unify	Unify community efforts
Increase	Increase communication
Address	Address an urgent issue

# When should you start a coalition?

- **Clear purpose:** Is the issue or problem clear enough that everyone can agree on what it is?
- **Trust:** Is there at least some trust among the individuals and organizations who'd make up the coalition?
- **Is a coalition in fact the best response to the issue?**
  - Will a coalition increase the likelihood that all the important factors are addressed?
  - Will a coalition increase the coherence, strength, and effectiveness of the community's response?

*The AAP Chapter 1 Mental Health committee was formed in 2017 in response to concerns by Chapter members regarding inadequate access to mental health services for children and families in our practices.*

# Who should be part of a coalition?



STAKEHOLDERS  
(MOST AFFECTED)



COMMUNITY  
OPINION LEADERS



CONCERNED  
COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS



SERVICE PROVIDERS



POLICYMAKERS

*The Mental Health Committee includes pediatricians from throughout our 48 counties, including general pediatricians and developmental pediatricians. We also have public health representatives, and mental health practitioners on our committee.*

# How to start a community coalition - 1

## Put together a core group

Individuals/organizations most affected by the issue

Influential people with lots of contacts

Personal contacts/network

## Identify important recruits

People or organizations you can't do without (someone without whom nothing can be done)

Special efforts to court them

## Recruit members to the coalition

Use core group's networks

Be as inclusive as possible

Direct contact

Have a specific, substantive offer or ask

# How to start a community coalition- 2

## Plan/hold a first meeting

Introductions

Define the problem & create a common vision

Discuss the structure of the coalition

Discuss the procedure for creating an action plan

Review tasks and persons responsible

Schedule the next meeting

## Follow up on the first meeting

Distribute meeting minutes

Follow up with people assigned to tasks

Recruit new members, especially for committees or task forces

Keep track of basic building blocks, especially ones not yet in place

## Next steps. Make sure you have:

An agreed-upon definition of the issue or problem

Vision and mission statements

An action plan

Leadership structure

?Professional staff

Resources

*The Mental Health committee's action plan includes primary care training, improved resources and access to mental health services.*



# Some guidelines for launching a coalition

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- Communicate openly and freely with everyone.
- Be inclusive and participatory
- Network at every opportunity
- Set reachable goals, in order to engender success
- Hold creative meetings
- Be realistic about what you can do: don't promise more than you can accomplish, and always keep your promises
- Acknowledge and use the diversity of the group
- Praise and reward outstanding contributions and celebrate your successes

# Progress to date – Mental Health Committee

- Conducted a survey of over 250 pediatricians regarding access to mental health care – 38% reported that their patients seldom had appropriate access to mental health services
- Held two Chapter CME events to train pediatricians in primary care mental health. Both events were sold out with over 200 primary care providers participating
- Partnered with numerous statewide advocacy group regarding access initiatives and legislation, including CALACAP, NAMI, California Children’s Trust.
- Partnered with other Chapter members to receive an ACEs Aware Communications Grant.





# Reflection

**Have you ever been part of an coalition  
(especially one related to mental  
health?)**

- What went well?
- What might you change?
- What lessons can you share?

# Resources

- Creating and Maintaining Coalitions
  - [Community Tool Box](#)
- AAP resources
  - [California AAP Advocacy](#)
  - [Chapter 1 Mental Health issues](#)
- Stakeholders
  - [California Children's Trust](#)
  - [NAMI California](#)
  - [Children Now](#)
- California Health and Human Services Committees
  - [MHSOAC](#)
  - [California legislature bills](#)
  - [Behavioral Health Task Force](#)

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