



U.S. Senate Reintroduces Bipartisan Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 8, 2023)- Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) reintroduced the Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act (IMHWSA) ([S.754](#)) in the U.S. Senate. The legislation would integrate mental health promotion and education, including eating disorders within existing K-12 local school wellness policies to provide a comprehensive approach to educating teachers, school administrators on their role in supporting mental health while also teaching children and adolescents the interconnectedness of physical and mental health. The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is appreciative of Senators Klobuchar and Lummis' for continuing to champion legislation to improve mental health and eating disorders education.

One in six youth experience a mental health disorder each year¹ and 2.3 million youth are coping with severe major depression.² Additionally, food insecurity, which increased rapidly during the pandemic, increases the risk of anxiety and depression by 257 percent and 253 percent respectively.³ Food insecure households also have higher rates of disordered eating behaviors.

“Over the past few years, more young people have reported a decline in their mental health. That’s why we must prioritize mental health education and services within our schools,” **said Senator Klobuchar (D-MN)**. “Our bipartisan legislation would include mental health care as a key component of local school health policies, ensuring that our students have access to the resources they need to thrive.”

“The Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act equips Wyoming schools with the tools needed to address and destigmatize mental health issues,” **said Senator Lummis (R-WY)**. “We have witnessed a concerning rise in mental health conditions, especially in our youth, following draconian COVID lockdowns. Educating kids across Wyoming how to best maintain their mental and physical health will ensure that future generations excel and live life to the fullest.”

¹ Whitney DG, Peterson MD. US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019;173(4):389– 391. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.5399.

² Mental Health America. (2021). The State of Mental Health in America 2021 Report. Retrieved from: <https://mhanational.org/issues/2021/mental-health-america-youth-data>.

³ Fang, D., Thomsen, M.R. & Nayga, R.M. The association between food insecurity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMC Public Health* 21, 607 (2021) <http://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10631-0>.

Research has demonstrated that including comprehensive mental health programs within schools help students' academic achievement and build upon core social skills, leadership, self-awareness, and caring connections to other individuals in their school and communities.⁴ Currently, local school wellness policies only address promoting physical health and nutrition education, missing the critical mental health component.

“This legislation ensures we support counselors, teachers and administrators so they are able to create the environments for every student to develop a healthy body image and positive food relationship,” said **Lisa Radzak, Executive Director of WithAll, an eating disorder nonprofit in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.** “This will benefit our kids’ health exponentially.”

“For Wyomingites, IMHWSA stands to have tremendous impact,” said **Kathleen MacDonald, former EDC Policy Director, and eating disorder and suicide prevention advocate in Wyoming.** “Wyoming has the highest number of suicides by state in the nation, with suicide being the 2nd leading cause of death among Wyomingites ages 10-24. Further, we have a large Native American population, who are known to suffer disproportionately higher suicide attempts than other ethnicities. I am grateful for Senator Lummis’ leadership and commitment to improving mental health education.”

“The Eating Disorders Coalition is tremendously grateful to Senator Klobuchar and Senator Loomis for reintroducing the Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act,” said **Laura Donahue, EDC Board Vice President.** “Eating disorders are often overlooked as a serious mental health concern, and integrating mental health education into school wellness programs and policies will provide a critical pathway for students to seek help.”

It is critical to address not just the physical, but also mental health of students. The Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act will help normalize and destigmatize mental health issues and open doors for more of the nation’s children and adolescents to recognize and seek help early. Coming out of the pandemic, the nation’s youth need support for mental health more than ever.

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders, and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can be found at:

<https://eatingdisorderscoalition.org/>.

Media Contact: Emily Rosenberg: erosenberg@eatingdisorderscoalition.org

⁴ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schelling, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of student-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*, 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.

