



Adolescent Mental Health

IECA is pleased that there has been widespread understanding of the growing mental health crisis among adolescents. One university President recently noted that he'd need as many counselors as professors to deal with the current caseload on his campus.

IECA supports legislation in three areas that could meet the current need:

1. Growing the availability of mental health support for adolescents within and beyond schools.
2. Legislation that provides critical oversight and sets minimum standards for residential therapeutic schools and programs while recognizing their vital role in providing effective treatment to adolescents dealing with substance abuse, behavioral disorders, and significant mental illness.
3. Ensuring parity of mental and physical health coverage by insurers.

Background

While state and local governments, school districts, colleges and universities all struggle to meet the needs of adolescents with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and more, none have the resources federal legislation could bring. IECA supports efforts to ensure local and in-school resources are provided and that insurance companies be compelled to cover the needs of troubled teenagers.

IECA recognizes the critical role assumed by residential treatment schools and programs. Nearly all teens sent to residential therapeutic environments have exhausted their local resources, including psychological and outpatient care, have been expelled by local schools, and leave parents with few options. Unless therapeutic programs operate, these are adolescents truly in danger of addiction and incarceration. In recent years, some adults have come forward with allegations of mistreatment or abuse in wilderness and other therapeutic environments in their past. Some have sought an over-reaction to shut down all programs despite the demonstrated effectiveness of the vast majority of these programs.

While national accrediting bodies exist and most state licensing boards provide supervision, this accreditation or licensing is not consistent in all states. It is time for the federal government to create minimum staff training and safety standards—note: IECA endorses excluding programs accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Programs from legislation.

IECA has a highly specialized, vetted specialty within the membership, recognized as leaders in helping families match their child's needs with expert knowledge, awareness, and review of the hundreds of program options. Our support for federal legislation is in agreement with the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, which has called for similar legislative action.

The University of New Hampshire has conducted the most extensive study involving nearly 5,000 adolescents treated in therapeutic schools or programs. They found that 85% of those at-risk youth who entered a program with clinical disorders improved to a non-clinical range and showed improvement in their condition.