



Youth Mental Health

IECA acknowledges the increasing recognition of the growing mental health crisis affecting children, adolescents, and young adults and welcomes the widespread awareness and attention to this critical issue. 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.

State and local governments, schools, and universities face significant challenges in addressing adolescent mental health needs due to limited resources. IECA advocates for federal support to enhance local and in-school services and ensure insurance coverage for children, teens, and young adults.

IECA recognizes the critical role residential treatment schools and programs fill. Nearly all youth 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, institutionalization, incarceration, and death. 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.

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.

The passage of The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act (SICAA) is a step towards providing critical oversight and setting minimum standards for residential therapeutic schools and programs while recognizing their vital role in providing effective treatment for adolescents dealing with substance abuse, behavioral disorders, and significant mental illness. This act requires the Department of Health and Human Services to contract with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to establish a federal work group to study and make recommendations about various aspects of youth residential programs. The National Academies must consult with experts in the field, including local, state, and federal agencies to gather data and recommendations.

IECA has highly vetted specialists within their membership who are recognized as leaders in helping families match their child's needs to residential program options. IECA therapeutic consultants include child advocates; health professionals; individuals experienced in working with youth with disabilities, including emotional, mental health, and substance use disorders; and experts on issues related to child abuse and neglect in youth residential programs. IECA believes their members would be excellent resources for the Academies' work group.