

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Pat Leahy
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the following national, state, and local organizations in the mental health and substance use disorder fields, we respectfully request your support for the following eating disorders-related Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) Subcommittee and Defense Subcommittee requests.

Eating disorders are often overlooked and under-resourced as a serious mental health condition that affects approximately 30 million Americans of all ages, races, and genders.¹ Every 52 minutes an individual loses their life as a direct result of an eating disorder, resulting in over 10,000 deaths annually.² The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for increased mental health services and supports. Not all demographics have been impacted in the same way as we have seen increased needs for pediatric and active-duty populations for eating disorders treatment. The following requests have the potential to make profound impacts on the lives of those with eating disorders.

Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)

We respectfully request that you continue to provide strong funding for the Primary Care Training and Enhancement programs at HRSA, including enhanced funding for the Education and Training on Eating Disorder program authorized by the Anna Westin Act provisions in Section 13006 of the 21st Century Cures Act.

As we know the subcommittee is acutely aware of the behavioral healthcare workforce shortage, specialized training for complex mental illnesses also falls short. Physicians and other health professionals are not adequately trained on how to identify and treat eating disorders. A study of 637 residency programs, 514 did not offer any scheduled or elective rotations for eating disorders.³ Of the 123 programs that did offer eating disorder rotations, only 42 offered a formal, scheduled rotation.⁴ We can do better to ensure individuals are diagnosed and referred to proper treatment.

¹ Deloitte Access Economics. The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders. June 2020. Available at: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped/report-economic-costs-of-eating-disorders/>.

² Ibid.

³ Mahr F, Farahmand P, Bixler EO, Domen RE, Moser EM, Nadeem T, Levine RL, Halimi KA. A national survey of eating disorder training. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2015 May;48(4):443-5. doi: 10.1002/eat.22335.

⁴ Ibid.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

We urge for the reintegration of unhealthy weight control practice questions within the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey and the creation of an eating disorders awareness campaign within the Division of Nutrition, Obesity and Physical Activity within the CDC.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to be a critical agency in monitoring eating disorder prevalence in youth and adults through their multiple surveillance surveys. However, in 2015 unhealthy weight control practices surveillance questions were removed from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System after collecting this data since 1991. Considering that a teen with anorexia nervosa has ten times the risk of dying than a same-age peer, examining trends of unhealthy dieting behavior is of critical importance.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the mental health of adolescents, with emergency room admissions for eating disorders doubling in girls ages 12-17.⁶ The lack of data collection since 2015 has hampered public health surveillance and interventions of this serious mental illness. Additionally, the creation of an eating disorders awareness campaign through the CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity to provide education and implementation of proper prevention strategies would assist families, guardians, community leaders, and other stakeholders to enhance awareness of this mental illness and how to intervene appropriately.

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

We respectfully request the highest level of funding possible for the NIH to increase eating disorders research funding across the NIH Institutes and Centers through the NIH Office of the Director. Additionally, we request a report from the agency on research and resources needed to address gaps in genetics, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of eating disorders.

Despite the severity of the medical complications associated with eating disorders, the NIH has historically underfunded eating disorders research. The NIH only spends ~0.11% of its budget on eating disorders research and the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) spends ~1.27% of its budget on eating disorders research, for a disease that affects 9% of the U.S. population and has the highest average cost out of any mental health condition.⁷

Department of Defense (DoD)

We respectfully request funding for the Secretary of Defense to furnish training for direct care military medical professionals on how to screen, briefly intervene, and refer to treatment for eating disorders. Additionally, we request that eating disorders continue to be listed as a topic under the Defense Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program.

⁵ Fichter MM, Quadflieg N. Mortality in eating disorders – Results of a large prospective clinical longitudinal study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 2016; 49:391-401.

⁶ Radhakrishnan, Lakshmi, Leeb, Rebecca, Bitsko, Rebecca . . . & Anderson, Kayla. (February, 18, 2022). Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019-January 2022. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 71. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/pdfs/mm7108e2-H.pdf>

⁷ Deloitte Access Economics. The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders. June 2020. Available at: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped/report-economic-costs-of-eating-disorders/>.

Servicemembers and military families are affected by eating disorders at elevated rates with diagnoses among military personnel having risen 26% from 2013-2016, and 21% of children of servicemembers and 26% of spouses of servicemembers currently symptomatic for an eating disorder. Despite this prevalence, military health professionals are not adequately trained.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Accanto Health | The Emily Program and Veritas Collaborative

Alaska Eating Disorders Alliance

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Be Real USA

Carolina Resource Center for Eating Disorders

CBT Center of WNC

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Clinical Social Work Association

E.L.M. Wellness

East Cooper Behavioral Health

Eating Disorder Coalition of Iowa

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Eating Disorders Resource Center

Exceptional Families of the Military

F.E.A.S.T.

Hanger Hall School

International Federation of Eating Disorder Dietitians

Lakeshore Foundation

Living Balance Psychotherapy

Lutz, Alexander & Associates Nutrition Therapists

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Military Child Education Coalition

Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN)

Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for Eating Disorders
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Eating Disorders Association
National League for Nursing
National Military Family Association
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Nutritious Thoughts
Project HEAL
Prosperity Eating Disorders and Wellness
REDC Consortium
Sheppard Pratt
SMART Recovery
Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders (STRIPED)
SunCloud Health
The Kennedy Forum
The Renfrew Center for Eating Disorders
The Trevor Project
Traci Malone Nutrition
Tricare for Kids Coalition
University of Wyoming
Washington University School of Medicine
WithAll
Wrobel & Smith PLLP

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Jon Tester, Chair, Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member, Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Betty McCollum, Chair, Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Ken Calvert, Ranking Member, Defense Appropriations Subcommittee