

Overview of the Need For and Methods of the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2025

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2025* will, for the first time, support community-based initiatives nationwide that use a public health approach to enhance their entire population's capacity for mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health and psychosocial problems generated by accelerating toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

This is urgently needed because mental health problems are at epidemic levels today. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic mental health problems were rising nationwide. According to Mental Health America, last year almost 20 percent of adults, or nearly 50 million Americans, experienced a diagnosed mental illness and 5 percent had a severe mental illness. About 8 percent had a substance use disorder, 10 percent experienced an alcohol disorder, and over 11 million adults reported serious thoughts of suicide.¹ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said that 1 in 5 U.S. children ages 3–17 has a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder, and the past Surgeon General issued an advisory on the youth mental health crisis, calling it the “crisis of our time.” In addition, a 2022 CDC survey found that overall, 37 percent of students at public and private high schools reported poor mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression.² A 2022 poll by the American Psychiatric Association found that 53 percent of adults with children under 18 said they are concerned about the mental state of their children.³

The historic storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves, droughts, and other disasters Americans are experiencing are aggravating these problems and creating new ones. In 2021 more than 40 percent of Americans lived in a county that was impacted by a major natural disaster. Disasters can traumatize 20-40 percent of those who are directly impacted, 10-20 percent of disaster response workers, and 5-10 percent of the general population who are not directly affected but know someone who is or view the events from afar.⁴ Consequently, the number of people who experience a mental health problem as a result of a disaster often outweigh those with physical injuries by 40 to 1.⁵

Community traumas are also increasing. This means an overwhelmingly stressful event such as hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, floods, or mass shootings that traumatize the majority of people residing in a specific neighborhood, town, or city.

Our mental health, human services, and disaster mental health systems cannot assist all of the people who experience mental health problems today, and this gap will grow over time as more frequent, extreme, and prolonged toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters occur. In addition, many people will not engage in treatment due to high costs, fears of being stigmatized, and other reasons.

To reduce today's epidemic of mental health problems, and prevent future ones, the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2025* will:

- Authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a grant program to expand existing community-based initiatives, and form numerous new ones, that use a public health

approach to strengthen population capacity for mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health problems generated by persistent toxic stresses, emergencies & disasters.⁶

- Provide 'Planning Grants' up to \$250,000 for one year to help communities organize a broad and diverse local 'Resilience Coordinating Network' that will lead community efforts to implement a public health approach to mental wellness and resilience.
- Provide 'Program Grants' of up to \$500,000 per year for up to four years to support the implementation and continual improvement of population-level mental wellness and resilience building strategies by a local 'Resilience Coordinating Network.'
- Set aside 20% of the available funds for rural communities.
- Establish a technical assistance program to assist communities in applying for a grant and support practitioners involved with Program Grants.
- Appropriate \$36,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2025 through 2029 for the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2025*.
- The community initiatives will develop their own age and culturally appropriate strategies to use a public health approach to engage all adults and youth in enhancing and sustaining mental wellness and resilience for all types of adversities, with high-risk individuals and those already experiencing symptoms of pathology given special attention as part of the larger population-level effort.
- The strategies will use evidence-based, evidence-informed, promising, and/or indigenous practices to engage residents in strengthening existing protective factors, and forming additional ones, to help all adults and youth push back against traumatic stressors, maintain mental wellness, and rapidly recover when they are impacted by toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.
- Individualized mental health services will remain very important by assisting people who cannot function or are at risk or harming themselves or others, and by in many ways supporting the community-based wellness and resilience building activities.

In summary, the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2025* provides a much needed expansion of our nation's approach to preventing and healing mental health and psychosocial problems by supporting community-based initiatives.

¹ <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2022/mental-health-america-adult-data>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/abes.htm>

³ <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/new-apa-poll-shows-sustained-anxiety-among-americans-more-than-half-of-parents-are-concerned-about-the-mental-well-being-of-their-children>

⁴ Goldman E. and Galea Sandro. (March 2014). Mental Health Consequences of Disasters. *Annual Review of Public Health*. Obtained at: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032013-182435>

⁵ <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/climate-change-and-mental-health>

⁶ <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2019/public-health-means-mental-health/>