



INTRODUCTION OF ANNA WESTIN LEGACY ACT BROADENS IMPACT OF THE LANDMARK LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, DC - On February 17, 2022, Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Thom Tillis (R-NC) introduced the *Anna Westin Legacy Act* in the U.S. Senate, with Representatives Doris Matsui (D-CA), Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ), and Ted Deutch (D-FL) committing to introduce a companion bill in the U.S. House. This bipartisan legislation will authorize the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (the Center), first created by the Department of Health and Human Services after the passage of the *Anna Westin Act* in 2016, to continue training and equipping health care professionals to screen, briefly intervene, and refer individuals to treatment for eating disorders. The Anna Westin Legacy Act's introduction coincides with the anniversary of Anna Westin's passing on February 17, 2000. Anna Westin once said, "may your dreaming never end and your voice never die" and the EDC is honored to work with Congress to keep Anna's voice alive.

"Up to 29 million people in the U.S. will suffer from an eating disorder in their lifetime, underscoring the importance of ensuring we have the resources in place to both diagnose and treat patients, **said Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)**. "As Minnesota Olympian Jessie Diggins has bravely said, we need people to know that help is available and they are not alone in this struggle. In memory of Anna Westin, a Minnesotan who tragically died of an eating disorder at the young age of 21, I was proud to successfully lead bipartisan legislation to increase education and training on eating disorders through the creation of the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders. Now, I've joined with a bipartisan group of my colleagues once again to support the Center and help countless families affected by eating disorders receive the care and services they need."

"I am proud to join my colleagues to continue the work the *Anna Westin Act* began on eating disorders," **said Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)**. "Since the passage of that landmark legislation, the Center has trained thousands of primary care providers across the nation to identify and refer individuals to appropriate treatment. Now more than ever, we need to ensure this training continues and more of the millions of Americans experiencing eating disorders receive the attention and care they need."

"Eating disorders take an enormous toll on a person's mental and physical health. In seeking help, sufferers need our health care system to recognize eating disorders as complex illnesses and understand that the road to recovery begins with a comprehensive treatment approach" **said Congresswoman Matsui (D-CA)**. "For the past five years, the National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders has been a critical tool for better training and educating health care providers to diagnosis and treat eating disorders. The expert support provided by the Center is key to breaking down systemic barriers that have historically made it difficult for sufferers to get the effective professional help they need. I'm proud to join my colleagues in introducing the Anna Westin Legacy Act, legislation that will ensure the continuation of this important work."

"Our Anna was an amazing young woman with hopes and dreams and a future filled with possibilities, **said Kitty Westin, Director Emeritus of the EDC and mother of Anna Westin**. "Tragically, her dreams were smashed when she died of anorexia on February 17, 2000. Anna left me with instructions, clearly spelled out in her journal, to keep her memory alive and to use her story to help others. I believe she knew that it

would take an “act of Congress” to address the multitude of issues caused by eating disorders. Today, the Anna Westin Legacy Act is being introduced fulfilling Anna’s dying wish. Our family is filled with gratitude to the leaders who are committed to making sure that the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders is fully funded, and the lifesaving work they do will continue. My dream is to see the day when all health care professionals are equipped to recognize the early warning signs of eating disorders giving people the chance to achieve their hopes and dreams and have a future filled with love, life, and good health.”

“The *Anna Westin Legacy Act* is bipartisan legislation that will help ensure health care professionals are able to recognize behaviors that may lead to or signal the presence of an eating disorder,” **said Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)**. “Through training primary care providers, the Center has helped thousands of patients get the care they need. Our bill allows this work to continue as we support the 192,000 Wisconsinites who are struggling with disordered eating.”

“As millions of Americans battle eating disorders, the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders – based at UNC Chapel Hill – is at the forefront of training health care professionals,” **said Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC)**. “This bipartisan legislation will enable the Center to build upon this important work, and I hope Congress will quickly pass this legislation and send it to the President’s desk to be signed into law.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the mental health of Americans across the nation, with youth exhibiting the steepest declines in mental health. Medical admissions for adolescents with eating disorders more than doubled in 2020.¹ Additionally, eating disorders diagnoses have increased 25% overall for people youth ages 12 to 18 since the onset of the pandemic.² Despite increasing prevalence rates, most pediatric and adult primary care physicians lack training in eating disorders, with only 20% of medical schools offering any elective trainings in the subject.³

Simultaneously, servicemembers and military families continue to be affected by eating disorders at elevated rates compared to the civilian population due to risk factors unique to their military experience.^{4,5,6} Diagnoses of eating disorders among military personnel rose 26% from 2013-2016,⁷ and 21% of children of servicemembers and 26% of military spouses are symptomatic for an eating disorder.⁸

To meet these needs, the *Anna Westin Legacy Act* will enable the Center to develop a pediatric protocol for screening eating disorders and coordinate closely with the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs Administration on screening and treatment. Additionally, the bill will continue equipping providers to identify and intervene for patients with eating disorders. This will build on the success of the Center, which has already trained over 7,000 primary care providers since 2019.

¹ Alana K. Otto, Jessica M. Jary, Julie Sturza, Catherine A. Miller, Natalie Prohaska, Terrill Bravender, Jessica Van Huysse; Medical Admissions Among Adolescents With Eating Disorders During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Pediatrics* October 2021; 148 (4): e2021052201. 10.1542/peds.2021-052201

² Dave Little, MD, Adrianna Teriakidis, PhD, Eric Lindgren, JD, Steven Allen, MD, Eric Barkley, Lily Rubin-Miller, MPH, April 2021, <https://epicresearch.org/articles/increase-in-adolescent-hospitalizations-related-to-eating-disorders>

³ Mahr F, Farahmand P, Bixler EO, Domen RE, Moser EM, Nadeem T, Levine RL, Halmi KA. A national survey of eating disorder training. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2015 May;48(4):443-5. doi: 10.1002/eat.22335. Epub 2014 Jul 22. PMID: 25047025.

⁴ Bartlett, B. and Mitchell, K., 2015. Eating disorders in military and veteran men and women: A systematic review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48(8), pp.1057-1069.

⁵ Waasdorp, C. E., Caboot, J. B., Robinson, C. A., Abraham, A. A., & Adelman, W. P. (2007). Screening Military Dependent Adolescent Females for Disordered Eating. *Military Medicine*, 172(9), 962-967. doi:10.7205/milmed.172.9.962

⁶ Higgins Neyland MK, Shank LM, Burke NL, et al. Parental deployment and distress, and adolescent disordered eating in prevention-seeking military dependents. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2019;1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.231806>.

⁷ Williams, Valerie AU., Stahlman, Shauna AU., Taubman, Stephen. (2018). Diagnoses of eating disorders, active component service members, U.S. Armed Forces, 2013-2017. VL-25.

⁸ Waasdorp, C. E., Caboot, J. B., Robinson, C. A., Abraham, A. A., & Adelman, W. P. (2007). Screening Military Dependent Adolescent Females for Disordered Eating. *Military Medicine*, 172(9), 962-967. doi:10.7205/milmed.172.9.962

“At a time when mental health needs have never been greater, we need to make sure our health care workforce is primed to screen eating disorders early and ensure the best possible care for their patients,” **said Representative Ted Deutch (D-FL-22)**. “This bill will support providers around the country who care for those struggling with eating disorders—and the millions of Americans who too often suffer in silence. It will ensure the Center’s critical work can continue and grow for years to come.”

“The Anna Westin Legacy Act is an important piece of legislation that ensures healthcare professionals are properly trained to assist individuals who are dealing with eating disorders,” **said Representative Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ-02)**. “I am proud to be moving this bipartisan effort forward to continue advancing the work that has already been done to identify and treat eating disorders.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the mental health of my students. Social isolation, lack of routine, and increased social media engagement has caused increased body dissatisfaction in students,” **said Dr. Kathryn Kalnes, Kinetic Wellness Faculty from New Trier High School in Winnetka Illinois**. “It is heartbreaking to witness. This population needs increased supports now more than ever.”

The Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders was awarded to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as part of the *Anna Westin Act*. Key provisions from the *Anna Westin Act* were passed within the *21st Century Cures Act (P.L. 255-114)* in 2016. The funding was awarded for 5 years and will expire at the end of 2022.

“For more than twenty years, the Eating Disorders Coalition has implored lawmakers to ensure America’s health care professionals are adequately trained to respond to these illnesses in the fullness of their enormity,” **said Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President of EDC’s Board of Directors**. “The introduction of The Anna Westin Legacy Act—in both chambers of Congress, with support from both sides of the aisle—well, that’s the sound of being heard. We are grateful for our congressional champions’ courage to act; their commitment and compassion are worthy of the bill’s namesake.”

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 also be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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