



## **Bipartisan Anna Westin Legacy Act Companion Bill Introduced in U.S. House of Representatives**

WASHINGTON, DC - On March 28, 2022, Representatives Doris Matsui (D-CA-06), David McKinley (R-WV-01), Ted Deutch (D-FL-22), and Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ-02) introduced the companion bill to [S.3686](#), the Anna Westin Legacy Act in the U.S. House of Representatives ([H.R.7249](#)). This bipartisan legislation will authorize the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders, first created by the U.S. 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. Between 2016 and 2019, over 7,000 health care professionals have been trained on eating disorders by the Center. The continuation and expansion of the Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders will help youth and families affected by eating disorders be identified and referred to needed treatment.

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 *21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act* ([P.L. 255-114](#)) in 2016. The funding was awarded for 5 years and will expire at the end of 2022.

“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-06)**. “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 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.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, eating disorders diagnoses have increased 25% overall for youth ages 12 to 18 since the onset of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Diagnoses of eating disorders among military personnel rose 26% from 2013-2016,<sup>7</sup> and 21% of children of servicemembers and 26% of military spouses are symptomatic for an eating disorder.<sup>8</sup> 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.

“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 Eating Disorders Coalition is jubilant to have the Anna Westin Legacy Act now introduced in both chambers of Congress, with support from both sides of the aisle,” **said Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President of EDC’s Board of Directors**. “Far too often eating disorders are undiagnosed because of health care providers’ lack of knowledge. Now more than ever is the time to train health care providers to increase prevention and treat those suffering from these life-threatening illnesses. The Eating Disorders Coalition is thankful to have committed and compassionate congressional leaders pushing this important legislation forward.”

*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.*

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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

*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](http://eatingdisorderscoalition.org).*

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