



Eating Disorders Coalition and The Trevor Project Host Briefing on Social Media’s Impact on Youth and Eating Disorders in Communities of Color

Washington, D.C. (April 11, 2022)- Last week, the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action and The Trevor Project hosted a congressional briefing titled “Today’s Pressures on Youth: Eating Disorders Stigma and Social Media Impact on Mental Health.” The briefing focused on educating Congressional staff and the eating disorders community on the rise and impact of eating disorders on youth, particularly youth of color and LGBTQ youth. It also included a discussion on the disproportionate harms of social media on marginalized youth and barriers to identification and treatment for eating disorders. The briefing promoted two EDC-led legislative bills: the Anna Westin Legacy Act ([H.R.7249/S.3686](#)) and the Kids Online Safety Act ([S.3663](#)). You can watch the recording [here](#).

Lisa Murano, Development Manager for the National Alliance for Eating Disorders moderated the briefing and discussed how social isolation, disruptions in routine, and increased social media use during the pandemic predisposed youth for disordered eating behaviors. Ms. Murano went on to share that marginalized youth, like youth of color, LGBTQ youth, and youth in higher weight bodies, are also at a higher risk for eating disorders but are less likely to be identified and treated.

Dr. Myeshia Price, PhD, Senior Research Scientist for The Trevor Project presented some of the research on eating disorders and factors that can increase risk like trauma, discrimination, food insecurity and relationship to suicide risk in youth, especially LGBTQ youth or color. She shared that LGBTQ young people experience significantly greater rates of both eating disorders and suicide attempts compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers.¹ Dr. Prices stated, “LGBTQ youth who have ever been diagnosed with an eating disorder had nearly four times greater odds of attempting suicide in the past year compared to those who had never suspected an eating disorder diagnosis.”

Mimi Cole, Founder of The Lovely Becoming and Clinical Mental Health Graduate Intern with Mindful Counseling shared her perspective as a clinician-in-training during the pandemic and the impact social media has on heightening the risk of an eating disorder. Ms. Cole commented that the pandemic has led to increased need for care while also noting clinics inability to keep up with the demand for care which prolongs an individual’s suffering. Further, Ms. Cole recognized that, “extended use of social media is really making us sick, especially mental health wise, [and] especially for young adolescents.” Ms. Cole understands the monetary interest for these platforms is user engagement but at the same time it is having negative effects stating, “if there is nobody who has an interest for the kids instead of the business’ interest, then we are really missing out on a lot of opportunities to help people.”

The EDC is committed to working for increased safety and transparency for youth online and calls on Members of Congress to help by supporting the Kids Online Safety Act. The bill would protect children’s mental health and safety online by protecting minors on social media from algorithmic harms, empowering

¹ Johns et al., 2020; Parker & Harriger, 2020

parents/caregivers, and holding platforms accountable for their promotion of eating disorders and other mental and physical harms. You can urge your Member of Congress to support this legislation [here](#).

Dr. Rachel Goode, PhD, MPH, MSW, Assistant Professor at UNC-Chapel Hill and National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (NCEED) concluded the briefing by discussing NCEED’s work of providing eating disorders training to health professionals. NCEED is a central source for aggregated, vetted, and evidence-based resources and guidance for health care providers. “Youth are often first seen by their doctors, and for it to be a truth that primary care providers don’t feel comfortable treating eating disorders is not acceptable,” said Dr. Goode. NCEED provides scalable and adaptable technical assistance that evolves to serve health care providers in multiple ways that align with how they practice. Over 7,000 providers have been trained on eating disorders by NCEED.

Funding for NCEED was provided in 2018 under the 21st Century Cures Act, which included provisions from the Anna Westin Act, which is set to expire this year. Congress can continue this critical funding by passing the Anna Westin Legacy Act. Funding will allow the Center to continue training and providing resources to primary care providers in screening, identification, and referral for treatment for eating disorder and allow the Center to expand to the pediatric primary care level, as well as build culturally specific models for communities at higher risk for eating disorders, including communities of color and LGBTQ communities. You can urge your Member of Congress to support this legislation [here](#).

“The EDC extends our gratitude to our incredible panel of speakers and our partnering organization, The Trevor Project for sharing their experiences and expertise in research, clinical-care, and education and training,” **said Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President of EDC’s Board of Directors.** “It is imperative that we continue educating providers on eating disorders, through the Anna Westin Legacy Act, in an effort to break down the barriers that impede access to eating disorders treatment for LGBTQ youth and youth of color. Simultaneously, we must recognize how social media platforms continue to perpetuate eating disorders stigma and harms and work to increase transparency to protect the mental health of youth. The Kids Online Safety Act is a tremendous piece of legislation that Congress can pass to keep kids safe and hold platforms accountable.”

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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