



EDC Commends U.S. House Education and Labor Committee for Passing Legislation to Include Eating Disorders Prevention in Schools

Washington D.C. (July 28, 2022)- Yesterday, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor passed *Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act* ([H.R. 8450](#)), led by Representatives Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-VA-03) and Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-01). This comprehensive child nutrition reauthorization bill addresses and prevents child hunger. The EDC supported *Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Schools Act* (*IMHWSA*) ([H.R. 5526](#)), led by Representatives Kathy Manning (D-NC-06) and Vicky Hartzler (R-MO-04) was included within the bill. Specifically, Section 1003 of H.R. 8450 would:

- Add mental health promotion and education requirements, including eating disorder prevention to existing guidelines for Local School Wellness Policies.
- Require the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to provide technical assistance for states and schools, including encouraging mental health promotion.
- Provide \$5 million to assist schools to integrate mental health promotion into their policies.

Currently, Local School Wellness Policies focus only on educating and promoting physical health and nutrition education, missing the mental health component. Research demonstrates that a focus on appearance and weight can promote disordered eating behaviors and can lead to body dissatisfaction.¹ Body dissatisfaction contributes to risk factors of almost all eating disorders and is a direct cause of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, isolation, suicidal thoughts, and substance use.² Research has demonstrated that including comprehensive mental health programs within schools helps students academic achievement and build upon core social skills, leadership, self-awareness, and caring connections to adults in their school and communities.³

¹ Danielsdottir, S., Burgard, D., & Oliver-Pyatt, W. Guidelines for Childhood Obesity Prevention Programs. Retrieved from: <https://www.aedweb.org/advocate/press-releases/positionstatements/guidelines-childhood-obesity>

² National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA); Neumark-Sztainer, D., Paxton, S.J., Hannan, P.J., Haines, M. (2006), “Does Body Satisfaction Matter?” *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

³ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schelling, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of student-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.

One in six youth experience a mental health disorder each year⁴, and 2.3 million youth are coping with severe major depression.⁵ Additionally, food insecurity, which increased rapidly during the pandemic, increases the risk of anxiety and depression by 257 percent and 253 percent respectively.⁶ Food insecure households also have higher rates of disordered eating behaviors.⁷ Fulfilling the policies of IMHWSA will help ensure students are receiving wellness programs that can have a meaningful impact on reducing mental health disorders, including eating disorders, in youth.

“We at Be Real are thrilled that our legislators are making youth mental health promotion a priority in schools, said **Denise Hamburger, Executive Director of Be Real USA** a non-profit organization proving free, evidence-based curriculum for body confident school environments. This will go a long way to preventing eating disorders, which have skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

"The National Alliance for Eating Disorders applauds the passage out of committee of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act," said **Johanna Kandel, CEO at The Alliance**. "This piece of legislation will serve as an important step to help bring attention and education to the current youth mental health crisis in our schools. In particular, we are extremely grateful that the legislation specifically addresses the awareness and prevention of eating disorders."

“The Improving Mental Health and Wellness in School Act provides gravely needed mental health resources to our educational institutions, giving youth the tools they need to flourish,” said **Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, Board President of the EDC**. “The EDC is pleased that Congress is comprehending the relationship between mental health and nutrition and the vital role they both play in child development. The EDC looks forward to seeing *Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids* move to the House floor for a vote.”

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a federal advocacy organization based in Washington, DC. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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⁴ Whitney DG, Peterson MD. US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019;173(4):389–391. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.5399

⁵ Mental Health America. (2021). The State of Mental Health in America 2021 Report. Retrieved from: <https://mhanational.org/issues/2021/mental-health-america-youth-data>

⁶ Fang, D., Thomsen, M.R. & Nayga, R.M. The association between food insecurity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMC Public Health* 21, 607 (2021) <http://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10631-0>

⁷ University Relations News Service, “Research Brief: Food Insecurity Raised Risk for Disordered Eating in Low-Income Adolescents,” University of Minnesota Twin Cities (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, August 13, 2020), <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/research-brief-food-insecurity-raised-risk-disordered-eating-low-income-adolescents>.