



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health Awards Two Grants to Address Eating Disorders in Adolescent Girls

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 19, 2022)- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office on Women's Health (OWH) awarded nearly \$1 million in grants to improve early detection and prevention of eating disorders in adolescent girls. The grants will support the development of evidence-based interventions that target COVID-19 related stressors and potential barriers to early diagnosis. The grant awards are part of a larger [HHS effort](#) to expand eating disorders prevention and awareness, improve care, and reduce stigma. The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) would like to thank HHS OWH for their investment to create greater access to care for eating disorders across the country.

The awards went to Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri and George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. The two recipients will develop and implement interventions to address modifiable risk factors, encourage behavior change, and improve health outcomes in response to eating disorder challenges intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. They will also create partnerships that integrate physical and mental health aspects of eating disorders among care providers, nutritionists, and/or other community organizations. The grants will be funded for three years.

Washington University's project will be co-led by Denise Wilfley, PhD, the Scott Rudolph University Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine, Pediatrics, and Psychological & Brain Sciences at Washington University School of Medicine, and Ellen Fitzsimmons-Craft, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine. They will be working strategically with the Missouri Eating Disorders Council for implementation of their project's program.

The team at Washington University will be implementing the [Body U Program](#) in Missouri middle and high schools. Body U is based on decades of research and is comprised of multiple evidence-based components, including online eating disorders screening, a digital self-help

program for adolescents at low risk of developing an eating disorder; a digital self-help program for adolescents at high risk of developing an eating disorder; a coached digital program for adolescents with clinical/subclinical eating disorders other than anorexia nervosa; and referrals to providers trained by the Missouri Eating Disorders Council for those screening positive for anorexia nervosa. The digital programs will also address the social isolation and loneliness which has increased over the COVID-19 pandemic for many adolescent girls and contributed to eating disorders symptoms. Over the course of this 3-year grant, they will implement the Body U Program in at least 10 public school districts in Missouri, reaching at least 2,000 girls. Additional state-wide partners that will help successfully disseminate and implement this program, as well as foster its sustainability include the Missouri Department of Mental Health, the Missouri Child Psychiatry Access Project, the Missouri Behavioral Health Council, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, the Missouri Coordinated School Health Coalition, and the Missouri Association for School Nurses.

“We are thrilled to have this opportunity to build upon the tremendous success the Missouri Eating Disorders Council—the first council of its kind in the nation—has had in terms of offering digital screening and prevention and intervention programs for adults in Missouri, as well as training providers in evidence-based treatment approaches for eating disorders,” **said Ellen Fitzsimmons-Craft, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine.** “We are so grateful for this funding and for the opportunity to expand these services to adolescent girls, with an eye to sustainability and finding ways we can broadly disseminate this program long-term—not only in Missouri but also nationally and globally,” **added Denise Wilfley, PhD, the Scott Rudolph University Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine, Pediatrics, and Psychological & Brain Sciences at Washington University School of Medicine.**

Annie Seal, Chairman of the Missouri Eating Disorders Council stated, “This is an exciting opportunity for us to expand our current programming to reach the most vulnerable population, adolescent girls, in severely under-resourced areas. We thank HHS for making this grant available and Washington University St. Louis for allowing us to be a strategic partner in this important life-saving program.”

George Mason University’s project will be led by Sarah Fischer, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology at George Mason University, Christy Esposito-Smythers, PhD, Professor of Psychology at George Mason University, and Amanda Sanchez, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychology at George Mason University. Their project will be working to improve the detection and intervention for bulimia nervosa, and implementation of sustainable strategies for detection and intervention in Fairfax County, Virginia following an increased need after the pandemic restrictions.

Over the last five years, the team has established strong collaborative community partnerships with, Healthy Minds Fairfax, Fairfax Consortium for Evidence Based Practice, Project Echo, and Fairfax County Public Schools, setting them up to begin work on providing evidence-based assessment and intervention for bulimia nervosa to the underserved adolescents in their community. Their approach will be consistent with a deployment focused intervention development model, in which they collaborate with community partners to develop and implement their detection, assessment, and intervention strategies directly within the partners systems of care serving historically marginalized adolescent girls.

“We are thrilled to receive this grant funding,” **said Sarah Fischer, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology at George Mason University.** “This funding will allow us to have an immediate impact in our community, and develop detection, assessment, and intervention strategies that target gaps in our treatment protocols for adolescents. Our teams’ focus is on the development of transdiagnostic intervention strategies that are also culturally responsive. This a huge need in the eating disorders field as most teens with eating disorders also have one or more other mental health conditions, and eating disorders cut across all demographics in the United States. We are very excited to partner with the Office of Women’s Health and DHHS to begin this work.”

“The EDC congratulates Washington University and George Mason University for these generous awards from OWH and for their passion and dedication to further advancing eating disorder care,” **said Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President of EDC’s Board of Directors, Founder of Veritas Collaborative and Senior Vice President for Community Engagement of Accanto Health.** “Both projects have tremendous potential to maximize screening, intervention, and referrals for eating disorders that can hopefully open opportunities for their programs to be implemented throughout the United States.”

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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