



Statement from the EDC:

President Biden to Spotlight Mental Health During State of the Union Address Tonight

WASHINGTON, DC (March 1, 2022) - Tonight, President Biden will take center stage to address the nation regarding his Administrations' priorities for the country. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, President Biden is expected to discuss the harmful impact of social media on youth mental health and the need for improved access to care. Social media has fueled the pediatric mental health crisis and has been conducting a "national experiment" on our children for years. Platform algorithms knowingly promote harmful eating disorders and other mental health content to youth in return for boosted engagement and profits.

Sadly, social media platforms have increasingly taken advantage of youth during the pandemic as isolation has spawned increased social media usage. In particular, social media algorithms have placed extreme eating disorder, depression, and self-harm content next to youth-targeted advertising and served these messages to vulnerable users to maximize engagement and spending. Frequent and prolonged social media use has been correlated with depressed mood and negative appearance comparison in youth, leading to increased risk of disordered eating. These impacts have been reflected in eating disorder emergency room hospitalizations for teen girls increasing by 50% since 2019.¹

While sharing steps to address the effects of social media platform predation, President Biden will also focus on preventive action to create accountability for social media platforms under the administration's existing authority. This accountability will instill a duty of care to protect minors from the mental health harms, sexual trafficking, and illegal products that social media can promote.

In addition to holding social media platforms accountable, President Biden is anticipated to share a three-prong proposal to address the harms of social media on youth mental health including

¹ Radhakrishnan, Lakshmi, Leeb, Rebecca, Bitsko, Rebecca . . . & Anderson, Kayla. (February, 18, 2022). Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019-January 2022. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 71. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/pdfs/mm7108e2-H.pdf>

building a system of care, connecting kids to care, and having more support on the ground and online. Actions to reach these goals include:

- (1) increasing the supply and diversification of the mental health workforce to be culturally and linguistically competent;
- (2) expanding care and coverage, and enforcing mental health parity, including integration of care into the primary care setting and untraditional settings like the community; and
- (3) expanding services upstream and downstream to address vulnerable populations and people in transition periods, including youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, and formally incarcerated individuals.

“I recall Fred McFeely Rogers—of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood fame—inviting his colleagues in broadcast television to champion human dignity and decency in their content, to acknowledge the growing influence of the platform upon developing hearts and minds,” **said Chase Bannister, MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, President of EDC’s Board of Directors.** “Fred Rogers offered a dialectic to the public— ‘We have the choice of encouraging others to demean this life or to cherish it.’ he said. The present state of disrespect, disregard, and even disinformation too clearly reveals our choice. Social media’s clumsy drive to ‘move fast and break things’ also broke people. We must insist on protective measures, guard rails, and guidance on our social media & technology platforms,” **said Bannister.** “The mental, emotional, and physical harm is real. It is darkly measurable, countable in lives lost. We can do better, and the next generation need not have as many casualties as we. Plainly, it is time for big tech companies to be accountable for their part in the breaking, to stop pretending the welfare of the nail is not the purview of the hammer. The EDC supports President Biden’s efforts, and we laud the Administration’s prioritization of the mental health of America’s children—our nation’s priceless treasure.”

The EDC encourages our community to watch President Biden’s State of the Union address tonight at 9pm EST to hear further details on the administration’s goals to support the mental health of all Americans. You can livestream the address [here](#).

The EDC is proud to be aligned with President Biden by working with Congress on two important pieces of legislation, the Anna Westin Legacy Act ([S.3686](#)) which will allow SAMHSA to continue training and equipping health care professionals to screen, briefly intervene, and refer individuals to treatment for eating disorders, and the Kids Online Safety Act ([S. 3663](#)), which will protect minors on social media from algorithmic harms, empower parents, and hold platforms accountable for their promotion of eating disorders and other mental and physical harms.

To amplify ours and the President’s mission, join us on Tuesday, May 17 from 9am to 5:30pm EST for our virtual advocacy day to share your experiences with eating disorders and social media harms to Members of Congress. Register [here](#).

***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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Media Contact: Emily Rosenberg: erosenberg@eatingdisorderscoalition.org