



Mission:

To work collaboratively on policies and practices in and around schools that promote equity and improve the physical, social and emotional health and well-being of children, youth and families.

Steering Committee:

Advocacy Action Network
Aetna Better Health of Kentucky
Alliance for a Healthier Generation
American Academy of Pediatrics-Kentucky Chapter
American Heart Association
Anthem Medicaid
Bounce Coalition
Cairn Guidance Inc.
Cumberland Family Medical Center, Inc.
Dept. Behavioral Health, Dev. & Intellectual Disabilities
Development and Growth Strategies, LLC
Feeding Kentucky
Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky
GLSEN – Bluegrass Chapter
Gordon Food service
Kentucky Humana Healthy Horizons
Kentucky Association for School Work
Kentucky Association of School Administrators
Kentucky Council on Problem Gambling
Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services
Kentucky Department for Public Health
Kentucky Department of Education
Kentucky Health Departments Association
Kentucky Nurses Association
Kentucky Primary Care Association
Kentucky PTA – 16th District
Kentucky Public Health Association
Kentucky Voices for Health
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Kentucky Strengthening Families
Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
Seven Counties Services Inc.
Spalding University
St. Elizabeth Healthcare
United Health Care
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville

December 19, 2022

Dear Legislator,

I am writing today to share the Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children’s (KCHC) **2023 Children’s Mental Health Legislative Agenda**. The Steering Committee of the KCHC is comprised of thirty-seven organizations and we have over 140 members, all invested in improving the health of children and youth in the Commonwealth. We are concerned with the mental health challenges our children, adolescents, and young adults are facing. These problems were serious and widespread even before the COVID-19 pandemic and have increased with it. An alarming number of our children and youth are struggling with feelings of hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and even thoughts of suicide.

The children and youth of Kentucky, our most valuable asset, are suffering. The 2021 Kentucky Incentives for Prevention (KIP) survey, administered to over 93,000 students throughout Kentucky, indicates that 25.2% of 10th and 12th grade students, 21.2% of 8th graders and 16.1% of sixth grade students reported feeling serious psychological distress (such as depression and anxiety). The 2021 suicide death data shows an increase in reported suicide attempts among 6th, 8th, and 12th grade students. Kentucky’s 6th graders reported the most significant increase, higher than the national average, from 3.8% in 2014 to 6.7% in 2021. Sixth-grade students also indicated a significant increase in deliberate self-harm, from 8.6% to 13.3%. The rates for many of the student’s mental health challenges are even higher among children and youth from low-income families, those of color, children and youth with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ children and youth.

Kentucky faces a shortage of mental health providers to respond to this crisis, a critical issue we hope will be addressed initially by increasing the availability of data to accurately assess this problem. While the provider shortage is being addressed, there are important resources which can be enhanced, such as placing a nurse in every school, all day, every day, as well as policies that can support the mental health of children and youth in both educational and community settings. In our legislative agenda, the KCHC has included some of these policy priorities grouped to address the workforce shortage, to address the grave issue of child suicide, and policies to protect children. We urge you and your legislative colleagues to review and consider these recommended priorities and to take action to address them.

I know you share our overall goal of ensuring that every child in Kentucky has access to high-quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate mental health care. The Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children is committed to advocating for evidence-based policies and programs to achieve this goal. We greatly appreciate your commitment to the health of Kentucky’s children and youth and look forward to our work together. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my staff with any questions you may have or for more information.

Sincerely,

Ben Chandler
Chair, Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children
President and CEO, Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

