



April 19, 2022

Chairman Wyden
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Ranking Member Crapo
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Chair Murray
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6300

Ranking Member Burr
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6300

Chairman Pallone
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

Chairman Neal
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Brady
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members,

As the member organizations of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP), we are writing to encourage the inclusion of health professions education and training programs in your legislative efforts to address the mental health challenges facing our country.

FASHP was created in 1968 as a forum for representatives of health professions education institutions to address education's role in organizational patterns of health care; to encourage effective collaboration among the professions in education and practice; to prepare health professions education for the future; and to serve as a liaison with other organizations sharing an interest in health professions education. FASHP comprises 18 associations representing a health professions education community that includes 7,429 programs, institutions, hospitals, and health systems, and more than 1.3 million students, faculty, clinicians, administrators, residents, and researchers.

Health professionals dedicate their careers to keeping people healthy, but too often they do not receive the resources and care they need to protect and maintain their own well-being, including for their mental health. Those working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic are putting their own health and safety, as well as that of their family members, at risk to provide critically needed care. Even before the pandemic, data showed that a large proportion of health professions have experienced higher levels of stress and trauma, with more than half of physicians, over 40 percent of nurses, and one in three of all health professionals experiencing symptoms of burnout.[1] [2] Preliminary studies already find that COVID-19 is having significant negative impacts on their mental health, including increased depression, anxiety, and

insomnia[3], and a greater risk for posttraumatic stress disorder.[4] In addition to their detrimental effect on health professionals and their families, burnout, stress, and other behavioral health issues negatively affect patient care, the patient experience, and overall health outcomes.

Furthermore, the pandemic has increased the mental health concerns of college students, including many who are working towards a degree in the health professions.[5] Of the nearly 17.5 million college students in the fall 2020 semester[6], about half of all college students nationally screened positive for depression, anxiety, or both.[7] Many are experiencing loneliness and social isolation, housing insecurity, and financial insecurity, while others have lost family members, which has impacted the safety of their living environments and support networks.

As Congress begins its work on a comprehensive mental health package, we urge you to consider the following recommendations that would help address the continued impact on the mental and emotional well-being of our health care and public health students and professionals:

- **Permanently Authorize Mental Health Provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act.** We applaud the inclusion of various mental health provisions in the American Rescue Plan (P.L. 117-2), specifically \$80 million for Mental and Behavioral Health Training to help reduce and address mental and behavioral health issues, such as substance use disorders, suicide, and burnout. This was a strong first step to provide essential services for our health professional students, but more must be done. Therefore, we strongly support permanent authorization for a program that directly supports the mental health of our health profession students.
- **Support Services that Address Burnout and Suicide.** FASHP is appreciative of the recent signing into law, the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act. This legislation will provide support and address the well-being of frontline and rehabilitative health care workers. FASHP calls for funding the grants authorized by this legislation. FASHP also appreciates the recent announcement by the Administration to take a whole-of-government approach to mental health. The Department of Education should take this opportunity to support students in health professions programs who often face significant stresses during their education and training.
- **Support for Institutions of Higher Education, including our Health Professions Schools and Academic Health Centers.** More support for institutions of higher education to help them address the growing needs of their students, including those in the health fields, is critical. From awareness campaigns to research dollars and grants, more resources can help hire and train additional counseling staff, support the promotion of mental health and wellness strategies, provide training to faculty on recognizing and addressing signs of mental health concerns among their students, facilitate community partnerships, and invest in digital support and telehealth platforms for counseling services. Increasing support and funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention grants is critical.

- **Increase Investments in Current Programs for Health Professional Students.** Mental and behavioral health concerns among our health care and public health providers are not unique to COVID-19. In order to ensure that our students and providers have support that is sustainable and continues in the long-term, FASHP urges Congress to authorize and appropriate funds to all programs that address the mental health needs of our current and future health care workforce - at both the tertiary level to provide support and services for those in immediate need and, perhaps more importantly, at the prevention level to address systemic issues that are the root causes of distress rather than the symptoms.
- **Include Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Providers:** Before the pandemic, our nation already faced a shortage of health care professionals; now, more than ever, a robust workforce is critical to meet our country's growing health care needs. Helping maintain our country's health workforce by reducing their outstanding education debt is certainly in the nation's short-term and long-term interest. Many health professions students take on significant education debt, which creates a financial burden after graduation, during further training, or in medical residency. Despite the cost, many still choose to pursue a career serving vulnerable patients in underserved public service facilities, such as federally qualified health centers, rural hospitals, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Support for student loan forgiveness programs, such as the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment program, are critical to incentivize, place, and retain the public health workforce necessary to tackle mental health needs.

Furthermore, a strong workforce is critical to combating the long-term impact of COVID-19 and addressing longstanding gaps in access to health care. Thus, investing in the public health professions workforce is vital. We urge you to consider the following::

- Supporting Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) mental and behavioral education training grant programs, including the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program and the Graduate Psychology Education (GPE) program.
- Expand and replicate programs like the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), administered by SAMHSA, as we work to reduce health disparities and improve behavioral health care outcomes for racial and ethnic populations.
- Support trauma-informed intervention programs at the Administration of Children and Families (ACF).
- Enhance support for HRSA's Public Health Training Centers (PHTC) to strengthen the public health workforce, by providing specialized training for public health students and workers.

FASHP looks forward to collaborating with you on policies that strengthen and promote the professional health care workforce and the vital role education plays in supplying the nation with highly trained health care and public health professionals. We invite you to utilize FASHP as a resource if you have any questions about health professions education and training.

Furthermore, if you are interested in connecting with health professions schools or programs in your state or district, FASHP members are available to assist you at any time. For additional information, please contact Otto Katt at otto@lewis-burke.com or Andrew Herrin at Andrew@lewis-burke.com.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you on these important issues to address the mental health needs of our health care students, providers, and patients.

Sincerely,

Federation of Association of Schools of the Health Professions

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Council of Academic Physical Therapy
American Dental Education Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Chiropractic Colleges
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of University Programs in Health Administration
Council on Social Work Education
Physician Assistant Education Association

[1]

<https://nam.edu/burnout-among-health-care-professionals-a-call-to-explore-and-address-this-underrecognized-threat-to-safe-high-quality-care/>

[2] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6367114/>

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