

NEWS RELEASE



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Over 160 Organizations Call on Congress to Enact the Bi-Partisan *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* This Year

Quotes Included From National Mental Health, Human Service, and Community Leaders

The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC),* supported by over 160 other national, regional, state, and local organizations that have endorsed the landmark bi-partisan *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* (CMWRA), today released a letter to Congress calling for the legislation to be passed this year.

This urgently needed new legislation will expand our nation's approach to mental health by supporting and funding community-based initiatives that use a public health approach to prevent and heal mental health, behavioral health, and psychosocial problems resulting from accelerating toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

In addition to the 160 plus organizations that have endorsed HR 3073/S 1452, the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act*, last summer and fall the ITRC hosted two virtual Congressional Briefings on the legislation that both Democratic and Republican members of the House spoke at. Over 1,400 people from across the US registered for each briefing, which indicates widespread interest in the legislation.

The list of endorsing organizations that endorse the CMWRA can be found at the end of this release. They include national organizations such as the: *National Association of State Mental Health Program Director; American Psychiatric Association; American Psychological Association; Mental Health America; National Association of Social Workers; American Public Health Association; National Rural Health Associatio,; Children's Environmental Health Network; the Anxiety and Depression Association of America; Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments; American Association on Health and Disability;* and many others. Numerous regional, state, and local organizations have also endorsed the legislation.

Comment from Bob Doppelt, Coordinator of the International Transformational Resilience Coalition

"'Community is Medicine' for our nation's current epidemic of mental health struggles and to prevent future epidemics resulting from rising toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters," said ITRC Coordinator Bob Doppelt. Over 160 national, state, and local organizations support the landmark *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act*. We strongly urge Congress to pass this very important legislation this year."

Quotes from Mental Health, Social Service, and Community Leaders From Across the Nation

"The American Psychiatric Association strongly supports the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act," said **APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A.** "This forward-thinking proposal would authorize grants focused on strategies to enhance the ability of communities to confront the mental health impacts of acute and long-term disruptions from natural disasters, as well as other public health impacts of climate change. The APA strongly supports this legislation to foster resilience and mental wellness in communities across the nation and asks Congress to promptly act on it."

"Social workers are on the front-line assisting individuals and families that experience the accelerating distresses generated by extreme weather events and their many consequences," said **Anthony Estreet, PhD, MBA LCSW-C, Chief Executive Officer, National Association of Social Workers.** "We know from first-hand experience that forming mutual support networks in neighborhoods and communities is vital to preventing and healing the personal, family, and social problems that can result from these adversities. For this reason, NASW strongly supports the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act and urges Congress to pass the bill."

"The American Public Health Association strongly supports the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act," said **APHA Executive Director Dr. Georges C. Benjamin.** "The mental health epidemic we are seeing nationwide is a public health crisis, and the increasing incidence and intensity of extreme weather events, along with a multitude of other rising stresses, will exacerbate the problem. APHA urges Congress to pass this legislation because it will fund and support communities that use a public health approach to improve mental wellness and resilience."

"The Children's Environmental Health Network firmly supports the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act," said **Kristie Trousdale, Deputy Director.** "Young people across the US are experiencing anxiety and other emotional struggles due to rising toxic stresses and disasters, and concerns about what they mean for their future. CEHN strongly supports the need to build population mental wellness and resilience to engage youth in activities that can prevent and heal these struggles. This is what the CMWRA will support and fund, which is why CEHN strongly urges Congress to pass this important legislation this year."

"Over 45 counties/communities in North Carolina have multi-sector coalitions that are working to address the stress load of residents from various realms of "ACEs"—including Adverse Childhood, Adverse Community, Adverse Climate, and Atrocious Cultural Events," said **Mebane Boyd, Resilience Community Officer, North Carolina Partnership for Children.** "Funding provided by the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023 could help sustain these grassroots organizations and the valuable work they are doing to educate, respond, and work on mental health prevention. For this reason we urge Congress to enact this important legislation this year."

"The mental health impacts of climate change must be considered in discussions on how to address this public health crisis, said **Katie Huffling, Executive Director, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments.** "Unfortunately, our current health system is not prepared to adequately care for those burdened by climate change. Nurses understand the importance of the proactive and holistic approach that is the foundation of the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023. Passage of the

Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023 is a much needed step towards building resilience and promoting mental wellness in the wake of the growing climate crisis and for this reason the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments strongly urges Congress to enact the legislation this year.”

"We need to give equal attention to preventing and healing the psychological consequences of the increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters as we do on building more resilient physical infrastructure," said **Dr. David Shern, Senior Associate, Department of Mental Health Bloomberg School of Public Health, Senior Public Health Advisor at National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, and former President/CEO of Mental Health America.** "It is critical that these population health issues be addressed systematically and quickly. Fortunately, we have tools to address this challenge, but need policies and investments to implement them. The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023 is essential in meeting these challenges and for this reason we urge Congress to enact the legislation this year.

“The Community Mental Wellness and Resiliency Act of 2023 is essential to create the social infrastructure throughout the United States needed to prepare our citizens for the array of mental health challenges resulting from toxic stresses and acute disasters,” said **Elaine Miller-Karas, Co-Founder and Director of Innovation at the Trauma Resource Institute.** “Our organization works across the U.S. and we have seen a systemic lack of preparedness to respond to the mental health challenges people face before, during, and after these traumatic stressors. This policy is urgently needed to support coordinated community-based initiatives and for this reason my organization strongly urges Congress to enact the legislation this year.”

"We know how to build strong resilient communities," said **Becky Turner, Director of Community Engagement for the Community Resilience Initiative in Walla Walla, WA.** "We follow the science, and we put our focus on weaving trauma-informed and resilience-based practices into the very fabric of our community. Data confirms that the use of resilience-based practices can help communities overcome adversity and related health outcomes. We now have renewed urgency to pass the "Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act" to ensure all communities have access to this life-saving and revelatory framework. or this reason we urge Congress to pass the legislation this year."

"America's current approach to persistent stresses and disasters is too reactionary, focused on providing support only after a traumatic event," said **Jesse Kohler, Executive Director of the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP).** "The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act will build community partnerships to help residents prepare for and respond in constructive ways to adversities. Resilient communities reduce the mental health consequences that can ripple through the community and help residents heal when traumas do occur. This is why we urge Congress to pass this very important legislation this year."

ITRC Coordinator Bob Doppelt concluded by stating “The fact that over 160 national, regional, state, and local organizations endorse the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* shows that professionals nationwide see the need to expand the way we address mental health issues to include

community-based initiatives that use a public health approach to build population mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health and psychosocial problems. We urge Congress to act.”

* The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC) is a network of mental health, social services, disaster management, social justice, and other professions working to establish methods to prevent and heal the mental health and psychosocial problems generated by the climate emergency and other adversities. Website: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/>

Organizational Endorsers of HR 3073/S 1452 *The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act*

International Transformational Resilience Coalition
National Association of State Mental Health Directors
National Alliance of Mental illness (NAMI)
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Mental Health America
American Public Health Association
National Association of Social Workers
National Rural Health Association
Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health
Rural Opportunity Institute
National Association of Regional Councils
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National League for Nursing
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
National Association of Community Health Workers
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Save the Children
National Federation of Families
American Association on Health and Disability
The Jed Foundation
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
International Society for Psychiatric Nurses
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Alliance for Positive Health
Rural Health Network of SCNY
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
American Lung Association
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU)
Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy
National Association of School Psychologists
Psychotherapy Action Network
Trauma & Resilience Initiative Inc.
Unitarian Universalist Mental Health Network
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Association on Health and Disability
Clinical Social Work Association
National Compadres Network
The Kennedy Forum
The Resiliency Group
Community Resilience Initiative
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Trauma Resource Institute
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy & Practice
Interfaith Power & Light
Climate Mental Health Network
New Leaf Counseling LLC
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
Whatcom Family & Community Network
International OCD Foundation
UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
Mental Health America of the Palm Beaches
American Family Therapy Academy, Inc.
American Counseling Association
Health Care Without Harm

Children's Environmental Health Network
Prevention Institute
Peace4Tarpon
Start Early
Birch Bay-Blaine Thrives
Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter
The Resiliency Initiative
Beaver Hollow
Metta Foundation
Lieberman Group, Inc.
Jen Johnson, MS, MFA, LCMHC
NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action
Resilience Climbing
Sabater Laboratory for Psychological Innovations Inc
Able-Differently
Reaching Resiliency
Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
One Shared Spirit
Seneca County Community Schools
Trauma Healing Project
Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing
Visible Hands Collaborative
The Children's Agenda
American Academy of Social Work and Social
Welfare
Earthday.org
Climate Resilience Leadership, LLC
SolaVida
MUYUMPA - Centro de Formación en Terapia Comunitaria
Thinkwell, LLC.
Lieberman Group, Inc.
Win Climate
Climate Psychology Alliance - North America
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Jennifer G. Gordon PhD PC
Organic Intelligence
The Blueford Group
Beaver Hollow
Trauma & Resilience Inc.
Climate Resilience Fund
Lakeshore Foundation
Glenn County Office of Education
Columbia Resilience
KLBRI
BasicNeeds US, Inc.
Vermont Climate and Health Alliance
CAN Climate Action Net
Climate Generation
Rising Communities (formerly Community Health Councils)
United Way of the Columbia Willamette
Truly Well
Resources for Resilience
Good Grief Network
Towson Therapy Group
Prevent Child Abuse New York
Family Focused Treatment Association
Resilience United
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Committee for Children
Resilient Brunswick County
Inseparable
Afterschool Alliance

18th Street Arts Center
Indivisible ReSisters Walnut Creek
ecoAmerica
Post Carbon Institute
Futures Without Violence
Aloka Earth Room
Moms Clean Air Force
Finger Lakes Community Schools
350 Eugene
Climate Psychiatry Alliance
The Resilient Activist
Generation Up (GENup)
EcoInfluencer Academy
Trauma Informed Oregon
Climate Health Now
Generation Up (GENup)
RI International
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
RIMYA Services
Our Climate
Community Resilience Research
Susanne Moser Research & Consulting
MENTOR Youth Development
The Family Focused Treatment Association
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine
Triple P America - Positive Parenting Program
100% Chaves County Initiative
Full Circle Florida, Inc.
Schools for Climate Action
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Safer Together
Classic City Mindful Movement
ACEs Matter, Corp
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Youth and Women for Change in Eswatini
Future Focused Education
Resilient Colorado
Peace 'In It' Counseling
Futures Without Violence
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc.
SabaterLAB Foundation
Trauma-informed Hampshire County
Between the Waters
Restore Hope
Participatory Research Consulting

Overview of the Need and Methods of the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act, HR 3073*, was introduced in the House by co-leads Representatives Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), along with original co-sponsors Don Bacon (R-NE), Mary Peltola (D-AK) and Kathy Castor (D-FL). They have since been joined by co-sponsors David Valadao (R-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Morgan McGarvey (D-KY), Shri Thanedar (D-MI), Donald Davis (D-NC), David Trone (D-MD), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Troy Carter (D-LA), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Brittany Petterson (D-CO), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Jerrold Nader (D-NY), Andrea Salinas (D-OR), Susan Wild (D-PA), Alma Adams (D-NC), Terri Sewell (D-AL), Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (MI At-Large), Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Gerald Connolly (D-VA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D DC-At-Large), Jill Tokuda (D-HI), Josh Harder (D-CA), and Becca Balint (D-VT).

A companion bill, S 1452, was introduced in the Senate by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

This urgently needed new policy will, for the first time, authorize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to fund and support community-based initiatives nationwide that use a public health approach to enhance their entire population's capacity for mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health and psychosocial problems generated by accelerating toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

This is needed because mental health problems are at epidemic levels today. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic mental health problems were rising nationwide. According to Mental Health America, last year almost 20 percent of adults, or nearly 50 million Americans, experienced a diagnosed mental illness and 5 percent had a severe mental illness. About 8 percent had a substance use disorder, 10 percent experienced an alcohol disorder, and over 11 million adults reported serious thoughts of suicide.¹ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1 in 5 U.S. children ages 3–17 has a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder, and the Surgeon General issued an advisory on the youth mental health crisis, calling it the “crisis of our time.” In addition, a 2022 CDC survey found that overall, 37 percent of students at public and private high schools reported poor mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression.² A 2022 poll by the American Psychiatric Association found that 53 percent of adults with children under 18 said they are concerned about the mental state of their children.³

The historic storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves, droughts, and other disasters Americans are experiencing are aggravating these problems and creating new ones. In 2021 more than 40 percent of Americans lived in a county that was impacted by a major natural disaster. Disasters can traumatize 20-40 percent of those who are directly impacted, 10-20 percent of disaster response workers, and 5-10 percent of the general population who are not directly affected but know someone who is or view the events from afar.⁴ Consequently, the number of people who experience a mental health problem as a result of a disaster often outweigh those with physical injuries by 40 to 1.⁵

Community traumas are also increasing. This means an overwhelmingly stressful event such as wildfires, floods, or mass shootings that traumatize the majority of people residing in a specific neighborhood, town, or city.

Our mental health, human services, and disaster mental health systems cannot assist all of the people who experience mental health problems today, and this gap will grow over time as more frequent, extreme, and prolonged toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters occur. In addition, many people will not engage in treatment due to high costs, fears of being stigmatized, and other reasons.

To reduce today's epidemic of mental health problems, and prevent future ones, the “Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act” will:

- Authorize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish a grant program to expand existing community-based initiatives, and form numerous new ones, that use a public health approach to strengthen population capacity for mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health problems generated by persistent toxic stresses, emergencies & disasters. ⁶
- Provide 'Planning Grants' up to \$250,000 for one year to help communities organize a broad and diverse local 'Resilience Coordinating Network' that will lead community efforts to implement a public health approach to mental wellness and resilience.
- Provide 'Program Grants' of up to \$500,000 per year for up to four years to support the implementation and continual improvement of population-level mental wellness and resilience building strategies by a local 'Resilience Coordinating Network.'
- Set aside 20% of the available funds for rural communities.
- Establish a technical assistance program in CDC to assist communities in applying for a grant and support practitioners involved with Program Grants.
- Appropriate \$36,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2024 through 2028 for the "Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act".
- The community initiatives will develop their own age and culturally appropriate strategies to use a public health approach to engage all adults and youth in enhancing and sustaining mental wellness and resilience for all types of adversities, with high-risk individuals and those already experiencing symptoms of pathology given special attention as part of the larger population-level effort.
- The strategies will use evidence-based, evidence-informed, promising, and/or indigenous practices to engage residents in strengthening existing protective factors, and forming additional ones, to help all adults and youth push back against traumatic stressors, maintain mental wellness, and rapidly recover when they are impacted by toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

- Individualized mental health services will remain very important by assisting people who cannot function or are at risk or harming themselves or others, and by in many ways supporting the community-based wellness and resilience building activities.

In summary, the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* provides a much needed expansion of our nation's approach to preventing and healing mental health and psychosocial problems by supporting community-led initiatives.

¹ <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2022/mental-health-america-adult-data>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/abes.htm>

³ <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/new-apa-poll-shows-sustained-anxiety-among-americans-more-than-half-of-parents-are-concerned-about-the-mental-well-being-of-their-children>

⁴ Goldman E. and Galea Sandro. (March 2014). Mental Health Consequences of Disasters. *Annual Review of Public Health*. Obtained at:

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032013-182435>

⁵ <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/climate-change-and-mental-health>

⁶ <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2019/public-health-means-mental-health/>