

## Advocating for Change

Almost one in five children in the United States has diagnosable mental illnesses, but less than 25 percent receive treatment. The shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists is a reason behind this discrepancy. Although 30,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists are needed in the United States, according to the Council on Graduate Medical Education, currently there are fewer than 7,500. This forces families to travel for treatment, seek help from providers who are not adequately trained, and, too often, go without treatment altogether.

### Educating Legislators About the Children's Mental Health Workforce Shortage

To support the AACAP's 10-year priority to increase recruitment into child and adolescent psychiatry and expand access to services for children and adolescents living with mental illnesses and their families, the AACAP is working with Congress to enact the Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act. This legislation would create a loan forgiveness program for all children's mental health professionals, including child and adolescent psychiatry trainees, who graduate with an average debt of more than \$100,000. It would also increase federal support for training programs.

To promote the Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act, the AACAP partnered with our members and allied consumer-based organizations through call-in weeks, worked with the news media, and organized its annual Hill Day. Call-in weeks are designated time periods

when AACAP members in specific states contact their lawmakers to educate them about legislation. More than 600 AACAP members called their legislators to relate how the workforce shortage impacts their constituents. In addition, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Associated Press* published articles on the shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists. The National Conference of State Legislatures' Legisbrief cover story brought the issue to bipartisan state policy makers and staff nationwide.

### Securing Greater Access to Mental Health Services

The AACAP also advocates for mental health parity. Parity will secure greater access to mental health and addiction treatment by prohibiting health insurers from placing discriminatory restrictions on coverage of treatment. Parity will enable millions of children and adolescents with mental illnesses to get the treatment they need.



### Improving Systems of Care

The AACAP has also been fighting for improved systems of care. In a system of care, mental health, education, child welfare, juvenile justice, and other agencies work together to ensure that children with mental illnesses and their families have access to the services they need to succeed.

The AACAP convened a special program at its 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting in San Diego called "The Road Ahead for Policy and Practice," where experts showed how systems of care are evolving and what the changes mean for physicians, families, and other mental health professionals. Specifically, the program focused on: 1) governmental policies, practices, and initiatives; 2) the role of advocacy efforts in supporting and driving

change on behalf of youth and families with mental illness at political and clinical levels; 3) the clinical challenges for child and adolescent psychiatrists and other mental health professionals participating in clinical service planning activities under a system of care orientation; and, 4) a review of the national research on outcomes data in the evaluation and guidance of efforts to improve the efficacy of service delivery in systems of care.

### Calling for Change in the Corridors of Power

The AACAP benefited from a long-term presence on the Hill in 2006 through the AACAP/APA Jeanne Spurlock Fellowship. The fellowship supports minority early career psychiatrists through experience in health policy and related legislative issues through an internship in the office of a member of Congress. **Toya Clay, M.D.**, completed her six-month fellowship in Rep. Jan Schakowsky's (D-Ill) office where she addressed the stigma associated with mental illnesses and educated policy makers and staff about child and adolescent psychiatry.

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