



### **Protecting Our Future, Body and Mind**

Over 21 million young people visited a healthcare professional last year, but only a small fraction were asked any questions about the number one contributor to poor life outcomes—their mental health. One in eight young people may have depression, and suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds. Yet, two-thirds of youth and young adults who have mental health problems do not get the help that they need. Increased access to mental health checkups could lead to early diagnosis and treatment of these disorders and thus prevent worsening conditions or suicide.

Federal and state governments already play a pivotal role in a range of prevention efforts to protect the health of young Americans including child immunizations, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, and diabetes and nutrition education. The **CheckUpNow Coalition** was developed by TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University and The Jed Foundation, and is supported by Active Minds, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Families USA, Mental Health America, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA). **The CheckUpNow Coalition** is calling on policy makers to endorse the following principles to provide this same coverage for mental health checkups and suicide prevention:

**Principle 1:** The President and leaders in Congress should include in federal health care reform a commitment to incorporating mental health checkups as a routine part of adolescent health care.

**Principle 2:** Federal and state governments should promote access to voluntary mental health checkups for all Americans between the ages of 11 and 24.

**Principle 3:** Federal and state governments should support a national education effort to increase public awareness about mental health checkups for young people and the impact of detecting mental disorders early.

**Principle 4:** Federal and state governments should work with health care providers and the insurance industry to ensure that mental health checkups are seen as a key first step to implementation of parity for mental health and are integrated into routine health care for young people.

**Principle 5:** Young people receiving care and prevention services through federal and state-supported health programs including Medicaid, CHIP, FEHBP, TRICARE and the Indian Health Service should be offered mental health checkups.

**Principle 6:** Appropriate federal and state agencies should initiate priority plans to expand mental health checkup programs to populations at elevated risk for suicide and mental illness.

**Principle 7:** Federal and state governments should support ongoing evaluation and improvement of the efficacy and impact of mental health checkups.

## Bipartisan Support for Early Detection of Mental Health Problems

The importance of early detection in mental health, as outlined in the **CheckUpNow Coalition** principles, has already received significant bipartisan support in the U.S. House and Senate as a means to promoting total wellness. Policy makers, such as Senator Ted Kennedy, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, and Congressman Patrick Kennedy, as well as former Senator Gordon Smith, have long encouraged their colleagues to back mental health and suicide prevention initiatives for young Americans, including early detection.

Former Senator Smith (R-OR) has been a strong advocate for mental health checkups since the loss of his son in 2003 and was instrumental in passing the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act for suicide prevention among young people. On the importance of mental health checkups, he says:

*Mental illness doesn't care if you're rich or poor, Republican or Democrat, from a loving family or a broken home. The only thing that matters is diagnosing the problem early and getting treatment to those who need it in time to make a difference.*

Congresswoman DeLauro (D-CT) reiterates the importance of access to both medical and mental health checkups as a public health imperative:

*We've accepted that it is good public health policy to make sure every child is vaccinated. Now we must do the same and make sure every child receives a mental health checkup. That's also good public health policy.*

The **CheckUpNow Coalition** is calling on policy makers to endorse these principles on behalf of America's young people. Through broad based, bipartisan support, the **CheckUpNow Coalition** will maintain strong partnerships with existing supporters in Washington and leverage new allies in advocating for mental health checkups and suicide prevention. By engaging policy makers, youth advocates, and the medical community, **CheckUpNow** will improve access to mental health checkups and secure a promising future for young Americans.

**The CheckUpNow Coalition is a mental health initiative focused on young people and was developed by the TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University and The Jed Foundation. It is also supported by Active Minds, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Families USA, Mental Health America, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA).**

