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First 5 Association of California Responds to New AAP Guidance to Enhance Mental Health Screenings for Children

SACRAMENTO—The First 5 Association of California, representing First 5 Commissions across the state, issued the following statement in response to a new [report](#) from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to promote pediatric screenings for mental health, emotional, and behavioral concerns.

The following can be attributed to Avo Makdessian, Executive Director of First 5 Association of California:

“California and the rest of the nation are unfortunately experiencing a mental health crisis, and we can’t lose sight of giving young children every opportunity for the best possible future. We appreciate the American Academy of Pediatrics for underscoring that mental health screenings must begin in the earliest years of life and acknowledging that identifying a need is only the first step. Screening must be matched with access to care, and that’s where California continues to fall short. If California wants to take the AAP’s recommendations seriously, we must invest in a diverse, culturally responsive workforce and build the community infrastructure to meet children and families where they are.”

Background:

The American Academy of Pediatrics’ new clinical [report](#), published in the September edition of *Pediatrics*, reiterates the AAP’s national *Bright Futures* guidelines for preventive pediatric screenings and offers providers additional clinical guidance to support their practice.

Last year, the First 5 Center for Children’s Policy issued a report, [“The Impact of California’s Mental Health Service Provider Shortage,”](#) providing policy solutions to address the shrinking provider workforce and ongoing underinvestment in child mental health. The report also highlighted how

this decline creates deep and inequitable gaps in access to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) services, especially for children with Medi-Cal health coverage and those in communities of color.

Some key findings highlighted in the report:

- 16 percent of children under age six have clinically significant mental problems requiring clinical care early in life.
- 21 percent of California children who required treatment for mental health issues were unable to receive it.
- 23 of 58 California counties had fewer than one psychiatrist per 10,000 residents in 2018, and six counties had no psychiatrist at all.

Recent [data released](#) by the California Department of Health Care Access and Information further emphasize these findings and illustrate the mental health workforce supply and demand through 2033. As the state seeks to address demand and grow the pipeline of providers, it must consider the unique needs of young children and their families.

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About First 5 Association of California

First 5 Association of California represents First 5 county commissions across California, serving more than one million children and families annually.

Learn more at www.first5association.org.