

Cárdenas, Johnson to Introduce Strengthening Mental Health Supports for BIPOC Communities Act

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WASHINGTON, DC – This week, **Representatives Tony Cárdenas (CA-29) Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX-30)** will introduce the Strengthening Mental Health Supports for BIPOC Communities Act, legislation to improve access to health services for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This bill amends the Public Health Service Act to make critical advancements in health equity for BIPOC communities by improving access to mental health services under the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) program.

“Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. For too long, people have been battling mental illness alone. Right now, 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 6 children in America live with mental illness. We all know someone who is struggling, and everyone is either directly or indirectly affected by mental illness. While the percentage of people affected by mental health disorders is relatively the same across racial and ethnic groups, people of color are less likely to receive mental health treatment due to a lack of access to services and cultural stigma. We must remove the stigma surrounding mental illness from our communities and ensure that everyone has access to mental healthcare to show those who are struggling that they are not alone.”

“As a former chief psychiatric nurse, I have spent many decades working to ensure that communities of color have the resources and services needed to care for their mental health. Especially during these troubling times, it is critical that our society comprehends how drastic health inequities develop due to the lack of systematic investment in accessible and culturally tailored health care – especially mental health care,” said Congresswoman Johnson. “I am proud to work with my colleague Congressman Cárdenas to ensure that our federal investments through the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant will be utilized by states for critical advancements in mental health services for communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We must continue to fight against the causes and consequences of such inequities in mental health and ensure that critical resources are available for where they are needed most.”

Endorsing Organizations: 2020 Mom, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American Association on Health and Disability, American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Clinical Social Work

Association, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, Education Development Center, EMDR International Association, Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice, International OCD Foundation (IOCDF), Justice in Aging, Lakeshore Foundation, Mental Health America, NAACP, National Alliance against Disparities in Patient Health (NADPH), National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors, National Association for Rural Mental Health, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, National Disability Rights Network, National Register of Health Service Psychologists, The Trevor Project, Trust for America's Health, Union for Reform Judaism

Cárdenas and Johnson's bill requires state plans to report to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) information related to services provided to address health inequities within BIPOC communities and outcomes experienced, outreach to and hiring of BIPOC providers from multiple disciplines of mental health services, and training to providers on culturally and linguistically responsive services.

Nearly one in five American adults live with a diagnosable mental health disorder, but only 43 percent of these individuals receive treatment in a given year. While the prevalence rates of most mental health disorders are similar across racial and ethnic groups, there are large inequities in diagnosis and treatment. Limited access to high quality culturally and linguistically responsive services, discrimination, diverse provider shortages, and cultural stigma surrounding mental healthcare all contribute to persistent inequities in behavioral health treatment.

Last month, Congressman Cárdenas introduced the Strengthening Behavioral Health Supports for Schools Act. This bipartisan bill would authorize annual funding of \$25 million for the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), through Fiscal Year 2025, to operate a technical assistance and training center to provide schools and school systems with mental health and substance use disorder support and services for students during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Cárdenas also introduced the Crisis Counseling Act, which would automatically approve requests by any state, territory, and tribe for a Crisis Counseling and Training Program (CCP) after it had been granted a Stafford Act declaration. The legislation would remove bureaucratic hurdles that delayed critical support for communities as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the United States.

Congressman Cárdenas sits on the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Health Subcommittee.

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