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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that mental health issues  
2       among adolescents in Hawaii are on the rise, with many facing a  
3       combination of mental health challenges, substance use  
4       disorders, and the effects of recent traumatic events.  
5       Adolescence, a specific biological stage between ages ten and  
6       nineteen, is a period marked by rapid brain development and  
7       identity formation and therefore, a critical time for  
8       intervention. Research shows that half of all mental health  
9       conditions begin by age fourteen, but many remain undiagnosed  
10      and untreated. Early awareness and intervention can prevent  
11      mental health conditions from escalating, preventing lifelong  
12      impacts on individuals and their families. The effectiveness of  
13      substance abuse prevention programs in Hawaii has demonstrated  
14      the potential of statewide initiatives to address complex social  
15      issues. By establishing a similar framework for mental health  
16      prevention amongst adolescents, the State can address the rising  
17      needs of its adolescents and promote healthier futures.



1       The legislature further finds that Hawaii's adolescents  
2   have experienced significant trauma in recent years, including  
3   the effects of COVID-19, the Maui wildfires, and rising family  
4   instability caused by housing shortages and loss of essential  
5   services. These crises have led to increases in depression,  
6   anxiety, suicidal ideation, and behavioral issues among  
7   adolescents. Continuous stress, compounded by family and  
8   cultural trauma, contributes to toxic stress, which increases  
9   the risk of mental health disorders and substance abuse.

10   Adolescents are particularly vulnerable during this time of  
11   transition, and without intervention, many turn to substances  
12   such as cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco as coping mechanisms.  
13   These behaviors not only exacerbate mental health issues but  
14   also interfere with the normal development of the adolescent  
15   brain, leading to lasting emotional and cognitive challenges.

16       The legislature finds that there is a substantial gap in  
17   mental health services for adolescents in Hawaii. As of 2024,  
18   approximately 34.8 per cent of high school students in Hawaii  
19   report signs of depression, and 26.3 per cent of middle school  
20   students have considered suicide. Despite these alarming  
21   statistics, a significant number of youth do not receive the



1 mental health support they need. Recent reports show that  
2 approximately seventeen thousand adolescents experience a major  
3 depressive episode annually, and many youth engage in substance  
4 use as a means of self-medication for their mental health  
5 conditions. Preventive mental health services, including early  
6 screening, education, and intervention, are critical in  
7 addressing these issues before they escalate into more severe  
8 conditions. Comprehensive mental health prevention programs can  
9 help to reduce the incidence of substance abuse and promote  
10 healthy coping strategies that prevent long-term emotional  
11 distress. By integrating mental health prevention with existing  
12 substance abuse programs, Hawaii can build a more holistic  
13 approach to adolescent well-being. Such programs will not only  
14 reduce the long-term social and economic burden of untreated  
15 mental illness but will also foster resilience, emotional  
16 intelligence, and positive life skills in Hawaii's adolescents,  
17 creating healthier, more resilient communities for future  
18 generations.

19 The purpose of this Act is to promote a comprehensive,  
20 statewide mental health prevention initiative focused on early  
21 intervention, education, and support for adolescents by



1 appropriating funds for the department of health to contract  
2 with community-based organizations to provide preventive and  
3 early intervention mental health services to adolescents within  
4 the community.

5 SECTION 2. (a) The department of health may contract with  
6 community-based organizations to provide preventive and early  
7 intervention mental health services to adolescents within the  
8 community, including services within schools, to help  
9 adolescents develop healthy coping mechanisms, prevent substance  
10 abuse, and address mental health concerns early on.

11 (b) The department of health shall submit a report to the  
12 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of  
13 the regular session of 2027. The report shall include but not  
14 be limited to:

15 (1) The manner in which funds appropriated pursuant to  
16 this Act have been expended;

17 (2) The service providers that have received funding  
18 pursuant to this Act;

19 (3) The number of persons served and a description of the  
20 services provided;

21 (4) Any measurable outcomes; and



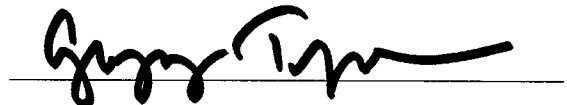
(5) Any proposed legislation.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$3,000,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the department of health to contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of health for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY:



JAN 14 2026



# H.B. NO. 1537

**Report Title:**

DOH; Adolescent Mental Health Services; Community-Based Organizations; Prevention; Early Intervention; Report; Appropriation

**Description:**

Appropriates funds to the Department of Health to contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community. Requires a report to the Legislature.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

