
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 2028. 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



1 (5) Any proposed legislation.

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

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

10 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



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. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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