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HHS Conference Report Calls for CDC to Include Eating Disorders in National Surveillance Systems to Monitor the Health of Our Youth

On Sept. 26, 2018, the federal appropriations bill authorizing funding for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was passed by the House of Representatives and is on its way to the President's desk for a signature this week. Accompanying the legislation is a Congressional conference report that includes a much needed recommendation for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist states in collecting data about eating disorders in national health surveillance systems. The specific recommendation to re-include standard items on unhealthy weight control practices and also to gather information on binge eating in the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System follows from an education initiative led by the [Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders](#) (STRIPED), based at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Boston Children's Hospital, working in close collaboration with the [Eating Disorders Coalition](#) and the [Academy of Eating Disorders](#).

Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) championed the urgent need to monitor unhealthy weight control practices among the nation's youth and coordinated steps to include the recommendation in the conference report. "It is imperative that we do a better job of detecting, tracking, and assessing eating disorders among adolescents," said Rep. Kaptur. "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveillance systems, the nation's premier tool for collecting health data, are the basis for public health prevention and treatment efforts. Without eating disorder data, we do not have a clear picture of adolescent trends across the nation and our communities are unable to effectively deliver therapies and treatments."

This federal recognition of the essential role of the CDC in monitoring eating disorders would not have been possible without Representative Kaptur's dedicated leadership and tireless support. One of the CDC's most important responsibilities is to monitor the health of all Americans by tracking changes in health trends. Yet the YRBSS stopped tracking unhealthy weight control behaviors in 2015, leading to a dangerous gap in data. Prior research using YRBSS data from 1999 to 2013 found that unhealthy weight control practices among adolescents continue to persist without any notable decreases. Without continued surveillance and updated data, state health agencies cannot take effective action to reduce these unhealthy practices.



Dr. S. Bryn Austin, Director of the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and President of the Eating Disorder Coalition, noted, “There is no agency more essential than the CDC in tracking the health of Americans young and old, alerting us when a health crisis emerges, and planning the public health response to help communities in need. Now with the support of Congress with Rep. Kaptur’s leadership, the message is clear that eating disorders are a critical public health concern and the CDC should do what it can to help states monitor the impact of eating disorders on their youth. With better understanding of the impact, we can improve programs to get affected youth into care early and ultimately help more young people make into adulthood healthy, strong, and thriving.”

Eating disorders are an urgent public health issue. Over 30 million Americans will experience an eating disorder in their lifetime, often starting in adolescence, yet few adolescents ever receive treatment (only about 25% with anorexia or bulimia and 10% with binge eating disorder). Early detection and intervention are essential to prevent the long-term harm and suffering caused by untreated eating disorders. Over time, eating disorders can also lead to cardiac disability, kidney failure, severe dehydration, osteoporosis, Type II diabetes, and death. In addition, 50% of people with an eating disorder also have a substance abuse disorder, thus early detection and intervention can catch symptoms early, before young people develop co-occurring serious health conditions. It is a tremendous step forward for Congress to recognize the scope and severity of eating disorders and to urge the CDC to re-institute regular surveillance of unhealthy weight control practices among our youth.

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