

Governor Phil Murphy

Marking National Mental Health Awareness Month, Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Cover Expenses for Adolescent Mental Health Screenings

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TRENTON – In advance of National Mental Health Awareness Month in May, Governor Phil Murphy today signed A3548 into law, which will require private insurers, the State Health Benefit Plan, and School Employees' Health Benefits Program to put into place policies and procedures to ensure coverage of expenses in mental health screening of a major depressive disorder for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18.

"The effects and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic has put the mental health of our adolescents at risk, and it's critical now more than ever to keep the well-being of our youth at the forefront of our post COVID-19 recovery," said Governor Murphy. "With today's bill signing, we are prioritizing the mental health of our children and ensuring that they receive the support they need during this time and beyond."

Under this new law, health benefits coverage will be provided to the same extent as for any other condition within the contract or policy. The insurer may not enforce on individuals who are covered that receive these services any form of cost sharing, including copayments, deductibles, or coinsurance. Currently, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) already requires coverage for adolescent depression screenings. By signing this bill, the Governor is taking steps to ensure that this coverage continues should the ACA ever be repealed or found invalid.

"Early diagnosis of depression and other mental health disorders is critical, as that is the primary way we can ensure our adolescents are receiving the help they may urgently need," said Senator Joseph Vitale, chair of the Senate Health Committee. "School, work, family life, and personal life tend to be among the main contributors to a person's stress and anxiety levels, and yet, many adolescents are currently unable to receive the treatment they need. This law will ensure that children and teenagers are able to receive timely and proper treatment for depression or other mental health issues."

"Major Depression Disorder affects eight percent of adolescents in the United States. Early intervention and diagnosis is key for proper treatment," said Senator Nellie Pou. "Due to financial hardships, mental health screenings may not be obtainable for every family that needs it. Ensuring that the proper mental health screenings and treatments are accessible to all people without risk of financial barriers is essential."

"To achieve better outcomes in adulthood, it is critical that we identify mental health disorders early," said Assemblywomen Pamela Lampitt and Verlina Reynolds Jackson, in a joint statement. "Depression screening is an easy way to catch mental health issues at an early stage and establish a treatment plan that will help manage symptoms. We must treat mental health care in the same fashion that we do for physical health and place a strong focus on preventative care. Mental health disorders are treatable, but it is important that we identify the problem before a person is in crisis. Given the prevalence of mental health issues among today's youth, we must take action to ensure adolescents struggling with their mental health are able to get the help they need."

Governor Phil Murphy

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