

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Unveils “Strengthening Youth Mental Health” Initiative as National Governors Association Chairman

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**PORTLAND, Maine** – Governor Phil Murphy announced his new “Strengthening Youth Mental Health” initiative today among governors from across the country. The National Governors Association (NGA) Summer Meeting marked the beginning of Governor Murphy’s term as NGA Chairman as he succeeds Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, with whom the New Jersey governor collaborated on several issues, including supporting infrastructure investment, promoting STEM education, and working to prevent mass shootings.

The unveiling of the Strengthening Youth Mental Health initiative comes amid an escalating youth mental health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, 37% of high school students reported poor mental health during the pandemic, and 44% reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Additionally, a study conducted by the Born This Way Foundation found that while 90% of youth rate their mental health a priority, only 40% rate their mental health quality as high, nearly 50% report that they do not know where or how to access care or help, and nearly 50% report cost as a key barrier to accessing care.

“It is an honor to stand alongside my colleagues today in the spirit of bipartisanship to discuss the current state and future of our nation,” **said Governor Murphy**. “There’s no better way to begin my term as NGA Chairman than by targeting an issue that affects us all and by announcing an initiative to which we must all contribute. The youth mental health crisis knows no bounds – neither geographic nor political – and we must similarly transcend state borders and political divisions to protect our children.”

The initiative’s four core pillars include prevention and resilience building, increasing awareness and reducing stigma, access and affordability of quality treatment and care, and caregiver and educator training and support. By advancing these key objectives, the initiative will further support success in and outside the classroom by acknowledging the relationship between mental health and academic growth, promoting the academic recovery of youths impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The evidence is clear when it comes to the alarming state of youth mental health in this country,” **said Amy L. Kennedy, former educator, mental health advocate, and leader of The Kennedy Forum**. “The question is, what are we going to do to address this public health emergency? By helping to advance thoughtful policies and programming at the state level, Governor Murphy and the National Governors Association are poised to make a tremendous difference in the lives of countless young people, families, and communities. I’m honored to be part of this timely initiative.”

“We know that youth across New Jersey are struggling emotionally and need help,” **said New Jersey Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. “The initiatives and investments funded in and by the FY23 budget agreement will expand and enhance the services and supports available to youth and keep them mentally well. Under Governor Murphy’s leadership and through the Strengthening Youth Mental Health initiative, New Jersey is taking an ‘all hands on deck’ approach to ensuring the wellbeing of youth in need, and keeping them safe, healthy, and connected.”

## Governor Phil Murphy

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