



## 2023 WCAAP Legislative Agenda

### Address the behavioral health crisis for children and teens

Children and adolescents in every community in Washington State are struggling with behavioral health issues, and our health care system – at every point along the care continuum – is not meeting the need. We risk significant long-term impacts to children and adolescents’ health, their academic success, and ability to have positive relationships unless we take meaningful steps now.

#### Solutions

- **Fund the Partnership Access Line (PAL) and the Washington Mental Health Referral Service for Children and Teens to:**
  - Provide First Approach Skills Training (FAST) for counselors in primary care and behavioral health centers, ensuring language and cultural sensitivity.
  - Increase the Referral Service’s FTE to keep pace with demand which has increased more than 60% in the past year.
  - Expand PAL training for primary care providers to best equip them to serve kids’ mental health needs.
  - Support psychiatrists’ time to provide case reviews and consultation for 10 primary care clinics at one hour/week.
- **Increase reimbursement for behavioral health counseling** on Apple Health for counselors in all settings.
- **Fund loan repayment and conditional grants** to help retain and attract an adequate behavioral health workforce to serve children and teens insured on Apple Health.
- **Support families of children with developmental disabilities, including autism**, sooner in community-based settings to prevent avoidable crises and hospital-based care.

[FAST](#) is brief, (4-6 sessions) evidence-informed behavioral therapy for youth which has been demonstrated to positively improve disruptive behaviors, anxiety, depression, and general psychological functioning.

### Improve child health and school success with daily access to healthy food

One-third of Washington households with children had low or very low food security and about half of all Washington households with children relied on food assistance in 2020-2021 ([UW WSU, 2021](#)).

#### Solution

Provide funding to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide free school meals to all children and teens in Washington State.

- Children who eat school meals consume a healthier diet overall than those who do not. ([CDC](#))
- Eating breakfast at school is associated with better attendance and better test scores. ([CDC](#))
- Hungry children are more likely to have to repeat a grade, exhibit behavioral problems in the classroom, and suffer from anxiety and depression.
- Providing free school meals for all children is a proven way to eliminate barriers and stigma for children to get the food they need for healthy growth and development. ([Hopkins](#))
- The American Academy of Pediatrics supports healthy school meals for all students, regardless of income eligibility, to ensure no children go hungry and to eliminate both the cost barrier to struggling families who do not currently qualify, and the stigma associated with free meals. ([Source](#))