



GHIAA

Greater Hartford
— Interfaith —
Action Alliance

ADVOCACY GUIDE: MENTAL HEALTH

HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status

ISSUE SUMMARY

The mental health crisis is at epidemic levels. Here in Connecticut, there are more than 561,000 adults living with mental health challenges, 160,000 of whom are not able to access the care they need. Young people are suffering, too. More than 40,000 youth ages 12-17 in Connecticut struggle with depression, and 49% of them did not receive any care in the last year. High school students who live with depression are more than twice as likely to drop out of school as their peers who are not depressed.¹

It is difficult to access mental health care in the best of circumstances. But it is nearly impossible for people who do not have insurance. Paying out of pocket is unaffordable even for middle-income people, let alone for folks with lower incomes. While only 5% of the overall population of Connecticut is uninsured, among undocumented residents of our state, that figure skyrockets to 58%.²

Undocumented pregnant people and children up to age 12 can now enroll in HUSKY coverage if they meet the income criteria. But this still leaves out adolescents (who are particularly affected by the current mental health crisis) and adults. In addition, immigrants who are legally present are also barred from HUSKY coverage until they have lived in the U.S. for at least five years. This needs to change.

Responding to hundreds and hundreds of oral and written testimonies, the Human Services Committee passed a version of HB 6616 that expanded eligibility through age 18 as of January 1, 2024, and required a study of the impact and cost of expansion through age 25. However, the Appropriations Committee reduced the age limit to 15 and pushed back the implementation date to July 1, 2024.

With our partners in the HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition, GHIAA calls on our legislators to include funds in the FY 2024-25 budget to expand coverage through age 18 as of January 1, 2024, as the Human Services Committee recommended.

¹ <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/ConnecticutStateFactSheet.pdf>

² <https://universalhealthct.org/application/files/4016/5774/2108/Presentation.Short.UHCT.f.2022.07.07.pdf>

TALKING POINTS TO USE WITH LEGISLATORS

- **Health care is a human right.**
 - No one should suffer or be denied treatment based on where they were born, or what papers they do or don't have, or how old they are, or how much money they make.
 - We cannot tolerate baby steps and piecemeal expansion when it comes to fundamental human rights.
- **Stopping enrollment at 15 is arbitrary, foolish, and cruel.**
 - Young people still have accidents, get sick, and need mental health support at age 16 and beyond. Furthermore, healthy children need healthy parents to care for them.
 - The current system leaves families stuck in the impossible situation of having to explain to their children why one can go to the doctor while their older sibling cannot.
 - Ensuring that young people have coverage through their critical adolescent and young adult years is a key foundation for healthy lives and healthy communities.
- **Expanding HUSKY coverage makes fiscal sense.**
 - Expanding enrollment through age 18 would cost only 0.5% of the state Medicaid budget, and an independent analysis by the RAND Corporation estimated that most of the cost of expansion will be balanced out by savings due to a reduced need for uncompensated care and emergency Medicaid.³
 - Compared to the state budget, this is not a large expense (and the value of human lives and flourishing is immeasurable).
 - Annual cost to expand to 15 and under = \$3 million (Approps budget estimate)
 - Annual cost to expand to 18 and under = \$8 million (HUSKY coalition estimate)
 - Annual cost to expand to 25 and under = \$15 million (DSS estimate)
 - When people have access to preventative care, they stay healthier in the long term, avoiding more serious illness and more costly and invasive treatments.
 - Our state is currently paying for emergency care when people lack access to appropriate primary care. Wouldn't it be better to invest those resources to keep people healthy?
- **Expanding HUSKY has broad public support.**
 - The public hearing for HB 6616 lasted for 12 hours and saw more than 700 written and more than 200 oral testimonies in favor of expanding HUSKY access through age 25.
 - A recent survey showed that 57% of Connecticut voters support expanding HUSKY to all undocumented immigrants (no age restriction), including 84% of Democrats, 83% of Black voters, and 76% of Latinx voters.

³ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1964-1.html