

# Pediatric Mental Health Newsletter

APRIL 2026

## April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is a meaningful opportunity to take action and renew our commitment to child abuse prevention and treatment efforts. Co-Chairs of ICAAP's Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (COCAN), Drs. Veena Ramaiah, MD, FAAP, and Kathy Swafford, MD, FAAP, have compiled materials to help you recognize and respond to child abuse and neglect, as well as educate and support patients and their families.

We hope you will consider using and sharing these assets on your various platforms and/or in your clinical spaces:

➤ [COCAN Resources](#)



## Upcoming ICAAP Webinars

on Pediatric Mental Health

🕒 **June 12 at 12pm**

**Frameworks for Protecting Immigrant Children's Rights** [Register Here](#)

Learn more about all of ICAAP's upcoming webinars on a variety of topics [here!](#)

## New Opportunities from AAP

### SCHOLARSHIP

**EQIPP: Mental Health – Identify, Assess, and Manage: Scholarships for clinicians in medically underserved areas**

The AAP Pediatric Mental Health Education Center (PMHEC) is offering scholarships to clinicians working in medically underserved areas (MUAs) who complete the EQIPP: Mental Health - Identify, Assess, and Manage [course available here](#).

Those who practice in an MUA who would like to apply for a scholarship can [click here for more information](#) on the application and requirements.

### EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

**AAP's National Center for Relational Health and Trauma-Informed Care**

Interested in learning more about taking a trauma-informed approach to care? Explore education and training opportunities [here](#).





# Resources

## **NEW!** Pediatrician-Backed Parent Email Guides on Autism & Pre-Teen/Teen Mental Health!

ICAAP is excited to launch two new parent email guides designed to offer clear, compassionate, and digestible information to support busy parents and caregivers.

**Each guide is available in English and Spanish and includes:**

- Short, daily emails with expert guidance written by pediatricians who understand the parenting experience firsthand
- Pre- and post-assessments to track parents' knowledge and confidence over time
- Optional resources for deeper learning, including local/IL resources
- Consistent encouragement to connect back with their pediatrician with specific questions for personalized care



### **Parent Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder:**

This 7-day email guide offers practical information on understanding early signs of autism, how a diagnosis is made, steps to accessing services in Illinois, supporting their child as they grow, and more.

- [Sign-up page for the Autism guide](#)
- [Promotional poster with QR code](#)



### **Pre-Teen & Teen Mental Health Guide for IL Parents:**

This 6-day email guide offers evidence-based guidance on how to talk with their pre-teen/teen about mental health concerns, what brain development and changes look like during this time, what's normal or when to seek help, and more.

- [Sign-up page for the Mental Health guide](#)
- [Promotional poster with QR code](#)

**How to Enroll:** Pediatricians can enroll families directly, or parents and caregivers can choose to enroll themselves.

*A special thank you to ICAAP members Dr. Ashley Fischer, Dr. Alissa Block-Rissman, and Dr. Shweta Chawla who worked closely with us over several months to carefully curate these resources!*

## **NEW!** CMS Releases Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) Behavioral Health Toolkit

This behavioral health toolkit was designed to help state Medicaid and CHIP agencies ensure children experiencing behavioral health challenges get the health care they need through Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.

The toolkit contains actionable strategies and state examples around four areas:

- Strengthening behavioral healthcare delivery system to meet a range of children's needs
- Promoting early intervention for children's behavioral health conditions
- Improving children's access to behavioral health care through service coordination/integration
- Expanding children's behavioral health services workforce capacity

[Explore the Toolkit](#)

## **PMHCA Technical Assistance Toolkit**

The Emergency Medical Services for Children Innovation and Improvement Center (EICC) has just launched the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) Technical Assistance Toolkit 2.0. This toolkit is designed to help PMHCA programs strengthen collaboration between emergency departments (EDs), pediatricians, and mental health providers to improve care for children experiencing mental and behavioral health crises.

Divided into eight sections, it provides practical guidance, workflows, and quality improvement (QI) strategies to improve responses for children in mental and behavioral health crises. Programs can use the toolkit step by step or adapt it to their specific needs, ultimately helping to create stronger pathways for pediatric mental health care.

[Explore the Toolkit](#)

# Peer Advisor Spotlight

## Dr. Shweta Chawla

Dr. Shweta Chawla is a board-certified general pediatrician with extensive experience caring for children and families in underserved communities. She currently practices at ACCESS Community Health Network, a federally qualified health center, where she provides comprehensive pediatric primary care while also serving as a pediatric committee member focused on standardizing well-child visits, vaccinations, and evidence-based pediatric care across the organization. She is actively involved in clinical education, mentoring medical students, family medicine residents and advanced practice providers, and frequently presents pediatric and mental health topics at organizational, professional and residency meetings. In addition, Dr. Chawla is the Reach Out & Read medical consultant at ACCESS, supporting early childhood development by integrating literacy promotion into pediatric wellness visits.

Dr. Chawla has a strong clinical and leadership focus in pediatric behavioral and mental health. She serves on the Mental Health Peer Advisory Board for the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and is an intermittent medical content reviewer for ICAAP, where she helps review behavioral health resources for both clinicians and families. Her work emphasizes practical, primary-care–based approaches to identifying, managing, and coordinating care for children with mental health and developmental needs.

Dr. Chawla holds an MBA in Healthcare Administration, which forms her systems-based approach to care delivery, quality improvement, and workflow optimization in pediatric practice. Her work bridges clinical care, mental health integration, and healthcare leadership, making her a strong advocate for sustainable, family-centered pediatric mental health care.



## Dr. Ashley Fischer

Dr. Fischer graduated her pediatric residency at OSF in Peoria and has spent the last ten years practicing outpatient pediatrics in Pekin, where approximately 50% of her patient panel was psychiatric medication management. She has completed the REACH Institute’s course in Patient Centered Mental Health Care in Pediatric Primary Care. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois College of Medicine and her work with the PFHC Mental Health Committee and the Greater Peoria Children’s Mental Health Initiative led to her being offered a position on the ICAAP Committee on Pediatric Mental Health. She also serves ICAAP as a Mental Health Peer Advisor for the Central Illinois Region as well as the ICAAP Speakers Bureau and Reach Out and Read Committee.

[Connect with ICAAP Mental Health Peer Advisors](#)

# Register for the Pediatric Mental Health Conference *Now!*

Join Us for Our In-Person Conference

Date: May 7, 2026, 7:45 am - 4:15 pm

Location: Jump Trading Simulation and Education Center,  
1306 N Berkeley Ave, Peoria, IL 61603

Admission: \$25

**Ideal for:** Pediatricians • Family Physicians • Allied Health Professionals • Social Workers • Professionals Providing Pediatric Mental Health Care

Earn: 6 hours of  
CME/CE or Social  
Work Credit



## Maximize Your Expertise & Build Confidence in Pediatric Mental Health Care

Engage with pediatric mental health experts, connect with colleagues from across the state, and streamline your clinical practice to help improve mental health outcomes for all children in Illinois.

- ✔ Build trauma-informed care strategies into your practice
- ✔ Enhance skills in addressing mental health issues in younger children (<11 years)
- ✔ Learn effective strategies for collaboration with schools
- ✔ Gain confidence in ADHD screening, diagnosis, and management
- ✔ Identify and address barriers to pediatric mental health care
- ✔ Better understand substance misuse screening and intervention
- ✔ Navigate legal considerations in pediatric mental health



### Book Your Stay

We have secured a room block at the Courtyard by Marriott Peoria for attendees seeking overnight accommodations.

See our special booking rates and secure your room!

**Book Online:** use the [booking link](#) or access the booking link on [bit.ly/mh-con](https://bit.ly/mh-con)

**Deadline:** to secure a room and discounted rate, all reservations must be made by **Monday, April 6.**

**Hotel Address:** 1928 West War Memorial Drive Peoria, Illinois 61614



### Register Today

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/2026-mh-con](https://bit.ly/2026-mh-con) to register online.



The Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics is accredited by the Illinois State Medical Society (ISMS) to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

The Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics designates this live conference for a maximum of 6 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit(s)<sup>™</sup>. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, and Medical Assistants can submit Certificates of Attendance to their accrediting board to claim credit for participation in the live conference.



## New Resource from SAMSHA: **Serious Emotional Disturbances in Children, Youth, and Young Adults**

Serious emotional disturbance (SED) affects an estimated 5-10% of youth in the U.S., often alongside complex co-morbidities such as substance use disorders, suicidality, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This paper provides an overview of SED, including the role of functional impairment in identifying youth with SED and the important developmental considerations. It also highlights the range of services available to support youth with SED, including school- and community-based interventions, as well as peer and family support services.

[Download the Publication](#)

# May is Mental Health Awareness Month!

Mental Health Awareness Month is a good reminder that caring for others starts with caring for yourself. Supporting your patients' mental health is essential, but it also comes with real emotional demands. Check out these tips from the AAP to help you stay grounded and keep showing up for your patients.



## Build Your Own Wellness Plan:

- **Be mindful of your physical and mental health:** Prioritize nutrition, don't work when ill, and seek support when needed
- **Maximize rest and sleep:** Aim for at least 8 hours per night with a consistent bedtime routine and minimal distractions
- **Make time to recharge:** Take breaks, use your vacation time, and spend time in nature when you can
- **Stay connected and engaged:** Prioritize time with friends and family and make space for hobbies and activities you enjoy
- **Utilize available resources:** Take advantage of ICAAP's educational tools and training to help ease the challenges of navigating pediatric mental health, and explore [AAP's physician wellness](#) resources for support with work-life balance, burnout recognition, and accessing mental health care