



April 15, 2019

Assembly Member Jim Wood, Chair
Committee on Health
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, California 95814

**RE: AB 898 (Wicks): Early & Periodic Screening Diagnosis, & Treatment services: behavioral health.
AAP-CA Position: Support**

Dear Assembly Member Wood:

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) representing the over 5,000 board-certified pediatrician members of California AAP Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 statewide, strongly supports proposed legislation AB 898 (Wicks) creating the Children's Behavioral Health Action Team to identify strategies and develop an implementation plan to increase children's access to critical behavioral health services.

All children should have access to the health care they need to thrive, including behavioral health care. Children of low-income families are particularly likely to experience emotional distress compounded by the difficulties and traumas associated with poverty. Estimates suggest that 22% of low-income children have a behavioral health disorder, and far more may benefit from occasional mental health services. Nevertheless, less than 5% of eligible youth in California receive any mental health services under Medicaid. This means that many children of low-income California families are not receiving necessary behavioral health services, giving them yet another obstacle they are unfairly tasked with overcoming.

AB 898 (Wicks) would improve delivery of critical behavioral health services to California children by forming the Children's Behavioral Health Action Team, to be charged with developing strategies to maximize federal, state, and local funding; addressing gaps in access to behavioral health supports for children; and identifying alternative contracting and payment arrangements that improve access to coordinated and integrated care for children and youth. The Action Team would also prepare an implementation plan laying out strategies to address these findings, providing a roadmap for the state to maximize children's health and well-being.

Pediatricians across the state of California urge an AYE vote on AB 898 (Wicks). Thank you for your public service and leadership on behalf of the health and well-being of the children, youth, and families of California.

Sincerely,

Kris Calvin
Chief Executive Officer, American Academy of Pediatrics, California

Cc: The Honorable Buffy Wicks; AAP-CA Leadership; AAPCA Advocate Lydia Bourne