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**ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES (AUCD) LAUNCHES
CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS**

SILVER SPRING, Md. – [Association of University Centers on Disabilities \(AUCD\)](#) expands its [National Center on Disability in Public Health](#) efforts with the launch of a new pilot program, *Children's Mental Health Champions*, made possible through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These *Champions* act as community change agents to increase positive parenting practices, kicking off a one-year term of service starting in June.

“We are excited and proud to launch this pilot program in six states. Early childhood is a critical period for long-term health and wellbeing. Positive and supportive parenting can protect children from adverse events and risks, and effective parenting programs can serve to support child development and to reduce problem behaviors,” says John Tschida, AUCD’s Acting Executive Director.

Six *Champions* were selected, representing California, Colorado, Kentucky, New Mexico, Virginia, and Washington D.C., to serve as liaisons to the CDC’s [Children’s Mental Health program](#). These *Children’s Mental Health Champions* will develop and test strategies for building partnerships to promote identification, screening, referral, and intervention for children who may need services to address problem behavior.

Champions provide timely support for children and their families as COVID-19 has impacted school closures, suspended home visiting services, made pediatric visits virtual, and caused additional stress and financial insecurity. *Champions* will develop state-specific work plans to implement effective strategies for mental health promotion, prevention supports, and the creation of networks (e.g., school, healthcare, and community) to promote better connections between these systems.

“Our goal is to expand the reach of evidence-based parenting prevention and intervention programs,” says Dr. Adriane Griffen, AUCD’s Senior Director of Public Health and Leadership. “We know that many parents experience barriers to access due to limited workforce capacity. With this effort, we make strides to develop a workforce skilled in serving all children – including children who may have a behavior concern or a disability.”

[AUCD](#) is a national, nonprofit network of university-based centers and programs in every state and territory working to advance policy and practice for people living with disabilities and their families. AUCD’s [National Center on Disability in Public Health](#) works with partners to address health disparities for people who have a disability. As people with disabilities are found within every subpopulation in America, AUCD collaborates with the civil and human rights community to support health and well-being of children who have behavior challenges and their families across the country.

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