

## The American Rescue Plan Act: Once in A Lifetime Funding Options for Developing Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Approaches

*Promote healing and address trauma to contribute to mental health and wellness.*

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have ways to come together to help individuals, communities, and the workforce recover and restore. Many have experienced an overload of stress from uncertainty, financial worries, social isolation, anxiety, fear, grief and loss. The [effects are disproportionate](#) among those who live with ongoing, embedded adversities. There is a toll on the mind and body that can have a lasting impact, including altering the structure and chemistry of the brain and causing long-term physical health issues. Because we all are [living through the pandemic together](#), we can take basic steps to equip everyone to respond to the effects of stress in themselves and others.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides [myriad provisions](#) to meet the mental health needs of children, families, the workforce, and communities nationwide. A trauma-informed approach is foundational to promoting well-being for everyone as part of the flow of daily life in settings like classrooms, workplaces, clinics, and child care.

### A Widespread Approach is Necessary

- The COVID-19 **pandemic is a traumatic event**, which means it can have lasting adverse effects on mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual wellbeing. We [see the trauma](#) in the uptick in sleep disorders, undesired weight gain, depression, burnout, and substance misuse.
- **Practical steps can be taken** to recognize and respond to trauma, and provide supports to those who have endured mild or intense anxiety, fear, isolation, and depression.
- The far-reaching impact of collective exposure to chronic stressors and trauma **necessitates approaches that equip as many people as possible** to recognize and respond to trauma in themselves and others.
- SAMHSA's "Four Rs" (right) is the framework to bring to all individuals, settings, and systems for the **best opportunity to address the predictable manifestations of trauma**, in the moments when they occur, at the necessary scope and scale.
- **ARPA funds can be used for proven, science-informed, and relatively inexpensive steps to address the effects of trauma**, as part of addressing mental health. These steps will help people realize their full potential today and into the future.

### The Four Rs of a Trauma-Informed Approach

A program, organization, community, or system that is trauma-informed...

- **REALIZES** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- **RECOGNIZES** the signs and symptoms of trauma;
- **RESPONDS** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices;
- Actively seeks to **RESIST** re-traumatization.

*USHHS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Planning and Innovation*

## Advocacy Talking Points for Babies, Toddlers, Preschoolers, and K-12 Students

- Children and youth are **developing and growing in an environment of elevated levels of stress and anxiety** brought on or exacerbated by the pandemic. They have experienced loss of routine, separation from caring adults, and the increased stress among their parents and caregivers. Many have faced additional stressors, such as loss of a loved one, food and housing insecurity, new parental violence and/or substance misuse, abuse or neglect, and more.
- Trauma-informed approaches help to **create consistent, predictable, enriched, and stimulating classrooms and settings** in the context of attentive and nurturing relationships. This is the formula that provides children and youth with opportunities to reach his or her full potential within in a familiar setting.
- Learning environments that use a trauma-informed approach **support and build on natural strengths, help establish social and emotional intelligence, and bolster resilience** while disrupting policies and practices that may be re-traumatizing.
- All adults connected to early childhood and K-12 settings need to be equipped to mitigate the impacts of these stressful experiences as they come up in the course of the day. They need additional support and new **ways to calm stress in themselves, and in their colleagues, the parents, and the children** in their care.
- Advocate to decision makers to **usher in trauma-informed approaches to early childhood and school settings as a valuable use of the one-time ARPA funds**. Part of the approach is shifting the culture, increasing knowledge, and teaching new behaviors, all of which will endure beyond the life of ARPA funding. In this way, responding to the stressors of the pandemic becomes a response to many of the chronic issues that occur every day.

## Advocacy Talking Points for Early Childhood Settings

- Adults in the child care ecosystem - providers, teachers, co-workers, center and system administrators - **have also faced increased stress**. Layered on top of perennial stresses of low wages, threats to business stability, meeting the diverse needs of young children, and burnout, many worked every day during the pandemic in face of the fear of COVID-19 exposure.
- **States and providers can use the ARPA Child Care Stabilization Fund** to support mental health balance, restore calm, and promote well-being by embedding the foundational building blocks for: realizing and recognizing the effects of trauma, knowing and responding to predictable behaviors, and minimizing the chance of re-traumatization, for example expulsion from a child care setting.

## Advocacy Talking Points for School Settings

- When the adults in the education ecosystem – teachers, classroom aides, administrators, support personnel and mental health professionals - understand the effects of trauma, they can **better understand the students who experience it and more effectively address the predictable behaviors** that stem from trauma when they arise.
- There is evidence that a trauma-informed approach to supporting staff **increases retention**, addressing the costly issue of workforce turnover and scarcity in the child welfare/education system, while reducing reports of compassion fatigue and burnout among staff.
- Advocate for decision-makers to **apply a trauma lens** when outlining requirements to obtain funding for programs/services. State and Local Education Authorities (SEAs and LEAs) can use **the ARPA Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund** to support mental health balance, restore calm, and promote well-being by applying the SAMHSA's 4 Rs of a Trauma-Informed Approach.

## Advocacy Talking Points for Behavioral Health and Healthcare Settings

- **Secondary and vicarious trauma is the indirect exposure to a traumatic event** through first-hand account or narrative of that event. Healthcare and human services professionals and workers experience secondary trauma, which has lasting effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Healthcare and human services professionals and workers **have fulfilled their jobs throughout the pandemic**, despite knowing that they would confront people infected by the deadly coronavirus. Many have spent time away from their own families out of fear they would infect their loved ones, while also witnessing people taking their last breaths - sometimes their own colleagues - without family and loved ones around with them.
- This has had **a major impact on workers' mental health and there need to be trauma-informed supports** for those who have served throughout the pandemic(s).
- Advocate to decision makers to **apply a trauma lens** and support **ongoing training initiatives**, including train-the-trainer programs, "Champion" learning collaboratives, peer support, and cross-sector collaboration to spearhead meaningful, sustainable TI change throughout communities and systems of care.
- There are various funding streams in **Section H of ARPA** that can be used for awareness campaigns and training to promote the mental and behavioral health of the healthcare workforce, including making their workplaces trauma-informed and healing-centered. Additionally, ARPA funds can be used for community-based funding for local behavioral health settings and behavioral health workforce education and training.

## Advocacy Talking Points for State, Local, and Tribal Governments

- Investing upfront in families, communities, and service systems that deepen awareness of and support productive responses to the traumatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will build a generation of adults who are able to understand and nurture their mental health and transform cycles of trauma into **resilient, positive, and healthy futures**.
- By bringing together diverse voices that represent the communities they serve, governments have the ability to create networks of support and plans to **grow their region's healing-centered and trauma-informed practices**.
- Advocate to decision makers to use the flexible **ARPA Coronavirus State and Local Recovery Funds**, available to states, counties, and municipalities, to **equip all systems** that reach and support individuals, communities and the workforce with the capacities to recognize and respond to trauma, promote healing, and rebuild wellbeing.