



## Mental Health Awareness Month 2017 & Related Efforts

*Donna Betts, PhD, ATR-BC, AATA President  
June 8, 2017*

May was Mental Health Awareness Month across the United States, and the AATA and several of our state chapters participated in events to raise awareness of the importance of mental health care and the role of art therapists.

In conjunction with Awareness Month, the AATA coordinated and launched an [online art exhibit](#), “I am a work of art.” In collaboration with the [Office of Head Start](#) and [Youth M.O.V.E. National](#), a call for art and invitation to young artists was distributed, and hundreds of artworks were submitted. AATA staff member Christina Easterly created the [digital exhibit](#) to celebrate the important role of art and creativity in mental health, wellness, and social-emotional well-being for our children, youth, and young adults.



*Children participate in the SAMHSA/AATA live art wall at Children's National Mental Health Awareness Day, May 4, Washington, DC. (Also showcasing AATA's digital art exhibit.)*



*From left: Allison Schmitt, Donna Betts (AATA President), Cynthia Woodruff (AATA Executive Director), and Michael Phelps.*

The month kicked off as we continued our long-standing collaboration with [SAMHSA](#) for [Children's National Mental Health Awareness Day](#) on May 4th in Washington, DC (*watch the webcast [here](#)*). The AATA was a proud Change Agent Supporter! Each year, the event draws national attention to the importance of caring for every child's mental health. More than 1,100 communities and 160 national collaborating organizations and federal programs observe Awareness Day through a range of activities. This year's theme focused on the necessity

of addressing physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health needs when providing services and supports for children, youth, and young adults. U.S. Olympic swimming champions Michael Phelps and Allison Schmitt were SAMHSA's Awareness Day 2017 [Honorary Chairpersons](#), and each spoke about how they overcame their mental health challenges.



*Attendees of the Awareness Day Event,  
May 4, Washington, DC.*

Throughout May, some of AATA's state chapters also got involved in Awareness Month activities! The Georgia Art Therapy Association ([GATA](#)) hosted its own 2017 Children's Mental Health Day Celebration, on May 6th. The free event showcased the benefits of art therapy for the health and wellness of children, teens, and their families. Art therapists shared creative activities that support children's mental health, relaxation, and wellness.

The Northern California Art Therapy Association ([NorCATA](#)) ran a fundraising campaign together with the AATA aiming to amplify the voices of marginalized teens who experience mental health challenges by helping them participate in a community art show and program, from May 5th–19th. Participating students' artwork was exhibited at the Sacramento Capitol Building, and they met with their district representatives.

The AATA was represented at key briefings in Washington, DC, that took place on Capitol Hill throughout the month. These included: May 1, *Children's Mental Health Panel*; May 2, *Green Ribbon Day*; May 4, *City Initiatives to Improve Behavioral Health*; May 16, *Peer Support Across Generations*; May 17, *Military Mental Health*, and *Maternal Mental Health*; May 18, *Medicare & Mental Health*; and May 24, *Transforming Crisis Care*.

The AATA's Executive Director Cynthia Woodruff and I attended the May 17 event, *Behind the Mask – Understanding Military Mental Health Treatment Options*, at the Cannon House Office Building. Sponsored by the [Military Mental Health Caucus](#), a panel of experts highlighted



*Rep. Tom Rooney (R-FL) describes the remarkable benefits of Creative Forces and the creative arts therapy services offered at NICoE, May 17, Washington, DC.*

effective treatments that are helping service members. Art therapist Melissa Walker and a team of creative arts therapists showcased how the creative arts therapies are building bridges for Veterans and service members at the [National Intrepid Center of Excellence](#); Warrior Canine Connection demonstrated the role of service dogs; the National Endowment for the Arts presented the benefits of the [Creative Forces](#) program in serving wounded warriors; and a Chief from the Army Office of the Surgeon General described the impact of integrative therapies on service members' readiness.

On May 24, AATA staff representative Clara Keane attended the Congressional Briefing “Transforming Crisis Mental Health Care” hosted by the [Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention](#). The panel emphasized the importance of coordination between emergency departments, law enforcement, behavioral health services, and other community members in order to provide comprehensive, accessible care to individuals in crisis.



*Representatives John Katko (R-NY) and Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA) at the Congressional Briefing “Transforming Behavioral Health Crisis Care,” May 24.*

Representative Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA) introduced the panel and expressed her long-time support of the Action Alliance. Representative John Katko (R-NY) shared a personal story of a friend who struggled with suicidal thoughts but did not have access to the appropriate treatment. He affirmed his commitment to improving crisis intervention care in his district, state, and across the nation. David Covington, CEO & President, RI International, Inc., Action Alliance Executive Committee Member, offered an overview of the [Crisis Now](#) report, a comprehensive analysis by the Action Alliance of crisis intervention in the nation’s “broken mental health system.” The report cites programs in AZ, GA, CO and WA, (see video, “[Transforming Crisis Services in Arizona](#)”) to be used as models to transform national crisis intervention tactics.

The AATA was a proud collaborator throughout the month of May in raising awareness about the nation’s mental health needs. But it doesn’t end there – the AATA engages in mental health advocacy throughout the year, and a short list of information and resources related to the AATA’s and collaborating organizations’ ongoing efforts is included below. Our involvement with groups such as the MHLG, SAMHSA, and many others is crucial to our ability to meet our mission, as is the support of our members. We value your continued investment in the future of art therapy, on behalf of all who are helped by art therapists.



*A sampling of works by young artists from [AATA’s online exhibition](#), #IAmAWorkOfArt. (With permission of the artists & guardians.)*

## AATA's & Collaborating Organizations' Mental Health Advocacy Efforts

### Recent Efforts

- [AATA Continues to Sign its Support of Mental Health Coverage and Education](#), May 25
- [AATA Signs onto Three Letters Protecting Coverage for Mental Health Services](#), May 11
- [AATA Signs its Support for Postpartum Funding](#), April 6
- [AATA Signs Letter to Protect Coverage of Mental Health Services](#), March 23
- [Protecting Children's Access to Healthcare: AATA Signs its Support](#), March 30
- [SAMHSA Releases New Webisode Exploring Identities and Challenges of LGBTQI2-S Youth of Color](#), March 30
- [AATA Signs Joint Letter Advocating for the Protection of Children's Coverage](#), March 16
- [AATA Signs Joint Letters Advocating for Healthcare Access and Transparency](#), March 9

### Mental Health Advocacy Resources

- [Mental Health America](#)
- [Mental Health Liaison Group](#)
- The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI): [Facts about the Prevalence and Impact of Mental Illness](#)
- [National Council for Behavioral Health](#)

### Medicaid Resources for ACA Replace/Repeal Legislation Advocacy

- [Commentary: House Health Bill Would End ACA's Medicaid Expansion, Leaving Most Enrollees Uninsured](#)
- [People Losing Medicaid Under House Republican Bill Would Face High Barriers to Coverage](#)
- [House Republican Health Bill Would Effectively End ACA Medicaid Expansion](#)
- [GOP Health Bill's Medicaid Cuts Threaten Care for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Medicaid is the Nation's Safety Net: Five GIFs](#)
- [There's No Painless Way to End the Medicaid Expansion](#)
- [The Devastating Cut to the Entire Medicaid Program Hidden within Obamacare Repeal](#)
- [Medicaid in Rural America](#)
- Georgetown University Health Policy Institute [Interactive Maps and County Level Health Coverage Data](#)



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