



AMERICAN COUNSELING  
ASSOCIATION  
*counseling.org*

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of our nearly 53,000 members who work with clients each day, the American Counseling Association (ACA) urges **the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to extend the public health emergency beyond its current July 25, 2020 expiration date so that licensed professional counselors can continue to offer the highest quality care possible during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.**

On January 31, 2020, you declared a public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, Americans' emotional, mental, and physical wellness has been significantly impacted in ways no one could have predicted. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that, as of April 2020, almost half of Americans reported negative impacts to their mental health related to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> The public health emergency declaration has been critical in providing the resources so that mental health professionals can provide these much-needed counseling services to children, adolescents, parents, adults, seniors, and families across the U.S. Further, your public health emergency declaration, in combination with your agency's expansion of several telehealth, telemedicine, and telebehavioral initiatives, have given valuable flexibility to mental health counselors across the nation and has provided greater access to care for millions of Americans.

In a recent survey of ACA members, counselors indicated that most of their clients' mental health conditions have worsened since the pandemic began. Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents indicated that clients' loneliness had worsened, followed by social isolation (95%) and anxiety (94%). Employment and financial concerns (91%), depression (90%), grief and loss (82%), acute stress/post-traumatic stress (80%), and substance use (75%) also appear to be worsening for many counseling clients.<sup>2</sup> In order to continue responding to the mental health

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<sup>1</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (2020). The implications of COVID-19 for mental health and substance use.

<sup>2</sup> American Counseling Association. (2020). Full survey available upon request.

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needs of millions of Americans, it is imperative for HHS to extend the public health emergency in order to maintain the expanded Telehealth Services List implemented during the declared public health emergency and continue to provide waivers for several telehealth restrictions.

For all of these reasons, the American Counseling Association strongly urges you to extend the public health emergency declaration before it expires on July 25<sup>th</sup>. If our organization can be of any assistance, or if you have any questions, please contact the ACA's Director of Government Affairs, Brian Banks, at [bbanks@counseling.org](mailto:bbanks@counseling.org) or at 703-823-9800, ext. 242.

Sincerely,



Richard Yep, CAE, FASAE  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Counseling Association