

## **ACA is at Work on the Policy Front for You and for the Clients You Serve**

**By: Brian D. Banks, Director, Government Affairs & Public Policy**

The American Counseling Association Government Affairs and Public Policy team is hard at work for you and for your clients. We have not pushed aside any assignments during this tough time. We continue to educate officials on all of the needs of all of the types of professional counselors who are ACA members.

Currently, we are:

- In touch with Members of Congress on Capitol Hill to bring counseling issues front and center and ask for their support with parity, as well as with telebehavioral health and telecounseling from a federal level—not just during emergencies, but all of the time. We have reached out to Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA), Rep. John Katko (R-NY), Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), who remain our champions on the Hill. They are aware of our interests and will advise us as we move forward.
- We are in touch with federal agencies, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) on Medicaid issues that affect our community. The federal departments are providing updates to ACA on a variety of issues affecting professional counselors, as these updates come in. We have expressed our concerns to their offices to ask for guidance on parity, telebehavioral health and telecounseling and other important concerns.
- Parity is a huge priority for ACA. We continue to push forward with the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (Medicare reimbursement).
  - We have a record number of bipartisan cosponsors (30 sponsors) in the Senate for S.286. In the House, we have 113 sponsors for H.R. 945.
  - The SUPPORT Act passed in 2019 and went into effect January 1, 2020. This helps us advocate for parity as it relates to Medicare. Due to efforts from ACA, we secured Medicare reimbursement for opioid treatment programs (OTPs), which is a huge step in the right direction. This allows for the facility that employs the LPC/LPMHC to receive Medicare reimbursement for the LPC/LPMHC's work.
  - The ACA Government Affairs team is reviewing state Medicaid guidelines now as they relate to telebehavioral health and telecounseling. Using this research, we will work with our professional counselors on staff to develop the appropriate message to take to the states to empower legislators to make the right decisions for the counseling profession. This is a process and it will take time. We want to get this right on behalf of you, our members. You can expect ACA to develop a plan to guide you on how to talk with your state leaders about this issue.
  - We continue to develop new partnerships. Our newest partnership is with the Western Governors Association. They have agreed to work with ACA in supporting the needs of professional counselors in 19 states and three U.S. territories. We are in the beginning stage of this partnership and expect great things to come. We are working to do the same in the other 31 U.S. states and additional territories.

Please know the issues listed below are a small portion of the work that we do for you.

It is imperative that we keep you informed about our work. And we sincerely ask that you continue to update the ACA Government Affairs team on policy issues in your state, as well as share your professional challenges because of current policies or the lack of policy. You can always reach us by e-mail at [advocacy@counseling.org](mailto:advocacy@counseling.org).

Also, please visit the [ACA Action Center](#), where you can scroll to the bottom of the page and sign up to receive policy alerts. When you receive an alert, please take two minutes to respond. Your response makes a huge difference in supporting our efforts.

Last, I would encourage you to check the [ACA information on COVID-19-related resources](#). You can expect frequent updates here from the ACA Team.

Counselors matter—and ACA is here to help you.