



Government Affairs and Public Policy

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American Counseling Association Government Affairs and Public Policy Agenda 2020

The American Counseling Association's legislative strategic plan for 2020 outlines activities selected to further the ACA mission to promote the counseling profession through state and federal advocacy.

2020 Federal Priorities

Secure Medicare reimbursement for licensed professional counselors.

Medicare is the primary insurance provider for approximately 59 million Americans, including adults age 65 and over and individuals living with disabilities. These individuals cannot currently use Medicare to receive services from LPCs, which limits their access to mental health services, especially in rural communities. To secure Medicare reimbursement for LPCs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Gain more co-sponsors for the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286/H.R. 945), bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate, would improve access to mental health services by permitting licensed professional counselors (LPCs) to be reimbursed by Medicare.
- Work to retain language in the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (H.R. 6), stating that the work of licensed professional counselors employed in opioid treatment programs certified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is eligible for Medicare reimbursement, as of Jan. 1, 2020. This reimbursement is to be made only to the opioid treatment programs and not to individuals
- Engage licensed professional counselors in congressional meetings and conversations around modernizing Medicare and providing a behavioral health-care pathway for millions of Americans.
- Advocate in tandem with the Mental Health Access Coalition on behalf of LPCs.
- Create a coordinated communications strategy to shed light on the flawed Medicare system and the lack of access to behavioral health services for those critically in need of them.

Work to increase investments in school-based mental health services and school-counseling programs through a regular congressional appropriations process.

ACA is in support of programs that make students safer at school, improve school climate, and improve access to school mental and behavioral health services. The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grant under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a flexible block grant, authorized at \$1.6 billion through fiscal year 2021. This grant is designed to ensure that districts have access to programs that foster safe and healthy students, provide students with a well-rounded education and increase the effective use of technology in our nation's schools.

To continue to increase investments in school-based mental health services and school counseling programs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- *Encourage* Congress to raise the discretionary spending caps and build on its recent investments in school-based mental and behavioral health services and trauma-informed policies and practices.
- Educate a wider array of Members of Congress, particularly those not on the education and funding committees, about the importance of and value of Title IV-A, with a focus on how the increased funding and flexibility is benefiting districts.
- Meet with Department of Education representatives and urge them to make resources available to states and school districts to increase student-support services to meet recommended ratios of students to school counselors (250 students per counselor or 250:1).
- Advocate in tandem with the Title IV-A Coalition through targeted communication efforts and an effective legislative push.

Continue to push for more jobs for licensed professional mental health counselors (LPMHCs) within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The increased hiring of LPMHCs within the Department of Veterans Affairs will reduce wait times for veterans seeking behavioral health services, as well as provide more career opportunities for licensed professional mental health counselors.

To continue the push for more LPMHC jobs in the Department of Veterans Affairs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Work with the congressional Veterans Affairs Committees and the Department of Veterans Affairs to increase access to behavioral health services provided by LPMHCs to veterans.
- Provide Veterans Administration (VA) officials with a platform at the ACA 2020 Conference & Expo to address attendee questions and concerns regarding career pathways within the VA.
- Educate Members of Congress and their staff on LPMHC education and training as it relates to treating veterans.
- Encourage Congress to support S. 785, The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019, which would improve the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

2020 State Priorities

Build a state-based policy framework to support the counseling profession in career growth and practice, specific to the needs of the communities served.

In 2020, ACA encourages states to expand their focus and broaden their reach within their respective communities in order to enhance existing state policy and programming efforts. The ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team aims to support states and territories in designing and implementing multifaceted state-level policy approaches dedicated to bettering the counseling profession through a continuum of localized strategy, programs and guidance. The team is partnering with ACA members and branches to provide policy options and advocacy engagement from a multistate and national perspective. The goal is bring states into greater alignment with each other to strengthen ACA's counseling network and leverage its collective power.

The American Counseling Association encourages states to focus on key issue areas for advancing policy in 2020. These priority areas include:

- **Building an Interstate Compact for Licensure**

ACA is actively sponsoring a nationwide collaboration with leading experts to lay the foundation for an interstate compact for licensure. In 2020, ACA is entering the bill-drafting phase, after a year of advisory meetings with subject matter experts. ACA will work with state legislatures and state and federal agencies to promote the licensure compact and recruit allied leaders.

- **Supporting Conversion-Therapy Bans**

ACA will support states in their efforts to align local practices with current best practices. We will monitor bans of the discredited method referred to as conversion or reparative therapy throughout the U.S. and provide strategic resources to advance state goals for these bans.

- **Ensuring Ethical Standards Meet Current Best Practices**

ACA is committed to promoting consistent ethical standards within the counseling profession and will foster relationships with boards, branches and members as necessary to ensure this remains a priority.

- **Ensuring Educational Standards Meet Current Best Practices**

ACA will encourage states to move toward greater alignment through outreach, monitoring regulatory board activity, promoting regulatory board representation in key states and providing ACA members with resources to advocate.

The American Counseling Association will engage in strategic advocacy with allied organizations and member networks to promote state policies that prioritize counseling. We will monitor key policymaking issues to ensure ACA members receive the support and guidance they need to advocate effectively on issues of importance to states. These policies include, but are not limited to:

- Expanding insurance coverage for mental health providers.
- Obtaining/increasing local funding and appropriations for enhanced school-based counseling efforts.
- Expanding local supports for community-based mental health programs for violence prevention.
- Expanding student loan repayment programs specific to the counseling profession.
- Implementing the Support Act and supporting drug-use-disorder treatment programs.

2020 Grassroots Priorities

The ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will work to enrich the understanding of ACA members about the role of the ACA department of Government Affairs and Public Policy by providing information on ACA's federal and state policies, as well as how to advocate for these policies.

The ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Empower ACA members by equipping them with the tools they need to successfully advocate on the federal, state and local levels.
- Empower ACA members to recruit and engage other ACA members in advocacy efforts.
- Engage with the ACA membership, virtually and in person.
- Engage with ACA members on a more consistent basis, which will in turn increase our advocacy.