



**AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION**
counseling.org

Support Access to Mental Health Services for Seniors, Veterans and those with Disabilities

S.286 & H.R. 945

Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2019


Bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate would improve access to mental health services by permitting Licensed Professional Counselors to be reimbursed by Medicare. Medicare is the primary insurance provider for approximately 59 million Americans, including adult age 65 and older, veterans and younger people with long term disabilities.

These individuals cannot currently use Medicare to see a licensed professional counselor (LPC). This limits their access to mental health care, especially in rural communities where mental health professionals are much more likely to be LPCs. The Mental Health Access Improvement Act will enable the nation's 200,000 LPCs to be reimbursed for treating Medicare beneficiaries.

Please cosponsor S. 286 and H.R. 945

- The number of Medicare beneficiaries is growing due to 10,000 members of the boomer generation turning 65 each day. These individuals are at-risk for serious mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse. A recent survey found that over 50% of practicing counselors had turned away potential clients due to this gap in Medicare reimbursement. This means people are going untreated.
- The opioid crisis is hitting Medicare beneficiaries hard, often due to their use of prescription painkillers, and Medicare is currently the largest single-payer for opioid-related hospitalizations. These individuals are unable to use their insurance coverage to access substance use treatment from LPCs.
- ACA worked with the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to gain support in keeping language in the Substance Use Disorder Prevention that Promoted Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act. The language supporting Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselors was retained in the bill language in 2019, and on January 1, 2020 it became an active regulation that Opioid Treatment Programs (OTP) may now bill Medicare for treatment provided by an LPC/LPMHC at an OTP. This reimbursement from Medicare are directed to go to the OTP where services were rendered.
- Current Medicare policy disrupts care. Over one-third of practicing counselors surveyed have worked with a client who transitions onto Medicare while in treatment due to age or disability. When this

6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600
Alexandria, Virginia 22304
ph 703-823-9800
800-347-6647
fx 703-823-0252



occurs, LPCs can no longer provide services and clients are left to look elsewhere for treatment, if they look at all. It means starting the therapy process all over.

- Medicaid, TRICARE, and private insurance plans all provide access to counseling services. Only Medicare **does not** reimburse LPCs for their services.

Licensed Professional Counselors can play a vital role in fighting the opioid crisis, depression, suicide and other mental health issues among Medicare beneficiaries. Please support the Mental Health Access Improvement Act.

For more information, contact the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team at advocacy@counseling.org.