

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Richard Neal  
United States House of Representatives  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin Brady  
United States House of Representatives  
1011 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
United States House of Representatives  
2107 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
United States House of Representatives  
2185 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Neal and Pallone and Ranking Members Brady and Walden,

The undersigned behavioral health and patient advocacy organizations urge Congress to address the mental health and addictions impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and include H.R. 945, the Mental Health Access Improvement Act, in the next relief package. H.R. 945 would allow licensed mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists to bill Medicare for medically necessary behavioral health services. Mental health and addiction issues have been exacerbated by this public health crisis and require proactive legislative solutions.

The Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) Rural Health Task Force released a report this month recommending that licensed mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists be added to the list of Medicare providers as a method of increasing access to care. The BPC highlighted how the report's policy recommendations offer solutions to the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the National Academy of Medicine, older adults are consistently underserved when it comes to behavioral health care. In the COVID-19 context, this is no different. The CDC and *The Lancet* medical journal both report that older adults are at an elevated risk of hospitalization and admission to an intensive care unit due to COVID-19. Moreover, roughly 4 out of 5 COVID-19 deaths are people who are 65 or older based on emerging CDC data. The increased risk of hospitalization and death, coupled with the intense social isolation resulting from extended stay-at-home orders, are creating a behavioral health crisis among the Medicare population.

Mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists comprise 40% of the mental health workforce and are licensed to provide medically necessary behavioral health services in every state. They are serving clients via telehealth through Medicaid and other programs, and they have the capacity to treat Medicare beneficiaries this way as well. Furthermore, they are often the only mental health professional available to underserved populations in many counties across the country. As telehealth and other solutions are considered in emergency response legislation, Congress must bolster the mental health workforce to deal with a coming surge in demand.

Please include H.R. 945 in the next COVID-19 relief legislation and allow Medicare beneficiaries access to mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists.

Thank you for your consideration,

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Suicidology  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Parkinson Disease Association\*  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Centerstone  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Families USA  
International OCD Foundation  
Mental Health America  
Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research  
NAADAC  
NACBHDD  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Board for Certified Counselors  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium  
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America  
SMART Recovery  
The American Counseling Association  
The Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Kennedy Forum  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
The National Council for Behavioral Health  
The Parkinson Alliance/Parkinson's Unity Walk\*  
The Trevor Project

\*Denotes organization is not an MHLG member.