

To:
Senator Mark Warner (via webform)
Date:
4/21/2020 11:12 AM
Subject:
Mental Health Provider Shortage & COVID-19

Dear Senator Warner,

I have worked with several elderly clients in the past and have seen the need for mental health services that counseling can offer. They are often isolated and in need of the caring help that a regular counseling appointment can facilitate. However, I rarely see any elderly clients due to my inability to accept Medicare. I am also concerned if counselors are not able to bill Medicare then there is a large generation coming up that will not have access to this profession as a way to help this life transition. Please consider this proposal. I am writing today to request your consideration of including the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (H.R. 945 & S.286) in a future COVID-19 stimulus package. The current pandemic has increased the need for mental health services across the nation. Inclusion of H.R. 945 and S.286 will help close the mental health shortage gap. Barriers to care currently limit access to mental health services for our nation's most vulnerable individuals. I am sincerely asking that the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Committee on Finance include Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselors (LPMHCs) in our nation's COVID-19 pandemic response effort. • LPMHCs are eligible to bill Medicaid, Tricare and private insurance, but are left out of providing mental health services to Medicare beneficiaries. • As of January 2020, opioid treatment programs (OTPs) are the only programs that can bill Medicare when services are rendered by a mental health counselor. There is a critical need for counselors in these areas-and outside of them, as well. • Clients have been known to turn to medications containing opioids when there are gaps in services, potentially leading to additional mental health concerns, including thoughts/attempts at suicide, increased trauma, and heightened stress and anxiety. The current COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the need for Mental Health Services, thus widening the gap and making it more difficult to serve those who need these services most. LPMHCs are equipped to provide mental health services, we just need your help in extending the viability of the mental health workforce. The demand is overwhelming in all 50 states and we are here to help. Please support the inclusion of H.R. 945 and S. 286 in the next COVID-19 relief bill. Thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Brandon Waggoner