

October 3, 2018

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Declaration

On the 10th anniversary of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW), the national voice for payers that manage behavioral health insurance benefits for over 175 million people, and its member companies today declared continued support for, and further commitment to, creating parity in behavioral health treatment and coverage.

While MHPAEA was signed into law on Oct. 3, 2008, ABHW and its member companies' efforts to address mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) parity have a much longer history – decades. As an original member and Chair of the Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage (Fairness Coalition), we worked with a diverse coalition of stakeholders to win equitable coverage of MH/SUD treatment, and were an avid advocate and supporter of the final bill that became law.

Mental health and substance use disorder parity is a right. Everyone deserves access to equitable, affordable, medically appropriate, high quality mental health and addiction services and treatment. ABHW member companies have diligently worked to drive consistent interpretation and enforcement of MHPAEA across the United States. We will continue our efforts through:

- Improved access to behavioral health treatment, services, and providers;
- Behavioral health co-payments that align with medical visit co-pays;
- Elimination of arbitrary treatment limitations on the number of days of coverage for a condition, as well as financial limits on annual and lifetime dollar caps;
- Adjustments to prior authorization requirements for mental health and substance use disorder services so that they are comparable to medical benefits; and
- Integration of medical, pharmacy, and behavioral health benefits to increase consumer engagement and reduce overall medical costs.

While great strides have been achieved, we acknowledge that more can be done to ensure that mental health and addiction parity is being implemented in the manner in which it was intended.

- Accreditation - Currently there is no parity accreditation standard that would deem a health plan parity compliant. Recognition of such an accreditation by consumers, federal and state governments, employers, and providers would support consistency of interpretation and assessment of parity compliance.
- Best Practice Examples – Additional illustrations from the federal regulatory agencies of health plans that are implementing MHPAEA correctly or states that are accurately enforcing MHPAEA would be very helpful in advancing parity compliance. If regulating agencies release de-identified information related to non-compliance issues it would provide interested parties with a thorough picture of the regulator’s intent related to MHPAEA and would lead to improved compliance.
- Substance Use Disorder - Currently, there is not parity in the way health care professionals access SUD records. This puts SUD patients at greater risk and inhibits integrated care for these individuals. Since SUD patients and their records are siloed from the rest of medicine, many individuals are receiving substandard, uncoordinated care.

ABHW and its member companies are committed to the full implementation and enforcement of the parity law. We will continue our efforts to work with consumers, employers, health plans, state Medicaid agencies, regulators, legislators, providers, behavioral health interest groups, and others to further parity compliance, educate consumers about the law, and provide the tools and resources needed to make informed decisions.

Signed,
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Aetna Behavioral Health
Anthem
Beacon Health Options
Centene Corporation
Cigna
Magellan Health
New Directions Behavioral Health
Optum
PerformCare

[ABHW](#) is the leading health plan association working to improve access and quality of care for mental health and substance use disorders. ABHW’s members include national and regional health plans who care for more than 175 million people. Together we work to reduce stigma and advance federal policy on mental health and addiction care. Member companies - Aetna Behavioral Health, Anthem, Beacon Health Options, Centene Corporation, Cigna, Magellan Health, New Directions Behavioral Health, Optum, and PerformCare.