



Advancing Health Care Policy
for Mental Health and Addiction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ABHW Submits Behavioral Health Recommendations for Future COVID-19 Packages

Washington, DC (April 22, 2020) – The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW), the national voice for payers that manage behavioral health insurance benefits for over 200 million people, today submitted a letter to Congressional leadership that contains suggestions on mental health and addiction policy proposals to include in future coronavirus legislation.

As Congress prepares impending coronavirus packages, ABHW strongly encourages the inclusion of legislation and policies that can play a critical role in expanding access to mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services. These services will be needed as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency and also will provide long lasting improvements to our nation's behavioral health system.

Recommendations include, but were not limited to, the following:

- **Make permanent the use of telehealth for mental health services.** Waiving restrictions on how and where individuals can access telehealth services has been vital to accessing care. Making the changes permanent will help address the growing need for behavioral health services.
- **Waive IMD Medicaid exclusion.** Ending the Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion would free up beds in local hospitals allowing them to better manage the surge capacity in both inpatient and emergency departments to care for COVID-19 patients.
- **Strengthen and expand the behavioral health workforce.** Supporting requests for emergency supplemental funding for behavioral health organizations and lifting barriers to Medicare coverage of mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists, peer support services, and technology infrastructure will ensure services and providers will be available to treat behavioral health needs.

- **Support suicide prevention efforts.** Designating 9-8-8 as the universal number for national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline will allow Americans to readily access mental health crisis services through a ubiquitous, easy-to-remember phone number. Incidences of mental health crises and suicides have been increasing annually, and will be exasperated by the social, health, and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Read ABHW's full list of recommendations >> [HERE](#)

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[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 200 million people. Together we work to reduce stigma and advance federal policy on mental health and addiction care. Member companies - Aetna Behavioral Health, AmeriHealth Caritas, Anthem, Centene Corporation, Cigna, Kaiser Permanente, Magellan Health, New Directions Behavioral Health, and Optum.