



Advancing Health Care Policy
for Mental Health and Addiction

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ABHW COMMENTS ON SENATORS BENNET AND CORNYN'S MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

A Bold Vision for America's Mental Well-being

Washington, DC (October 12, 2021) – The [Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness](#) (ABHW), the national voice for payers that manage behavioral health insurance benefits for over 200 million people, provided input on Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and John Cornyn's (R-TX) white paper, [A Bold Vision for America's Mental Well-being](#).

[ABHW](#) members are grateful for their leadership and look forward to working closely together on this important strategy. Behavioral health services have become increasingly important as a result of social isolation, job loss, illness and death, and domestic violence related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and we suspect the utilization of such services will continue long after the public health emergency (PHE) is lifted.

As outlined in the white paper, it is important to develop a national strategy, “founded on the principles of smart planning and funding allocation strategies”. [ABHW](#) provided the following comments for consideration:

Enhance access and delivery of behavioral health services by:

- Increasing access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT)
- Expanding the use of telehealth for MH and SUD services
- Strengthening and expanding the behavioral health workforce
- Ensuring health coverage for individuals released from jails and prisons
- Eliminating the Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) Medicaid exclusion
- Supporting suicide prevention efforts and increasing focus on crisis services

Update behavioral health programs to improve availability, cost management, and quality by:

- Developing a clear, universal compliance standard related to mental health and addiction parity

Integrate behavioral health services more seamlessly by:

- Promoting the integration of primary and behavioral health care
- Aligning 42 CFR Part 2 with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

Improve how funds and other resources are planned and allocated by:

- Investing in technological infrastructure

Full comments can be found [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/Beacon, Centene Corporation, Cigna, Kaiser Permanente, Magellan Health, New Directions Behavioral Health, and Optum.