



Advancing Health Care Policy
for Mental Health and Addiction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ABHW RESPONDS TO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE'S REQUEST FOR ENHANCING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Washington, DC (November 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, responded to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Ranking Member Mike Crapo (R-ID)'s open letter to behavioral health stakeholders requesting recommendations to enhance behavioral health care.

ABHW members are grateful for the Committee's leadership and look forward to working closely together on our shared goal to improve access to mental health (MH) and substance use disorders (SUD) care and treatment. 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.

We believe addressing the following issues can play a critical role in expanding access to MH and SUD services and provide long lasting improvements to our nation's behavioral health system.

Strengthening the Workforce

We encourage Congress to advocate for solutions to expand access to care and address ongoing workforce shortages across the country to help ensure people who need MH and/or SUD treatment get the care they need.

- Medicare coverage of mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists.
- Medicare coverage of peer support services.

Increasing Integration, Coordination, and Access to Care

- Increase access to medication assisted treatment (MAT) through the

- elimination of the X-Waiver and the in-person evaluation requirement.
- Support suicide prevention efforts and increase focus on crisis services.
 - Ensure health coverage for individuals released from jails and prisons.
 - Promote the integration of care.
 - Eliminate the Medicaid Institution for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion.
 - Issue regulation for 42 CFR Part 2.

Ensuring Parity

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

Expanding Telehealth

- Expand the use of telehealth for MH and SUD services.
- Invest in technological infrastructure.

Improving Access for Children and Young People

ABHW members are committed to addressing urgent challenges children and adolescents are experiencing as we strive to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Full comments and recommendations 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.