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Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness Survey Indicates Consumer Support for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity

Washington, D.C. – The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) announced today its Mental Health Parity Survey, which surveyed adults in the U.S. to understand their attitudes and preferences surrounding mental health and substance use disorder services. The survey found that consumers overwhelmingly support the intent behind mental health and substance use disorder parity, with 82% of respondents agreeing that the healthcare industry should give mental health and substance use disorder care the same priority as physical healthcare. Eighty-four percent of respondents also feel it is important to ensure fair and equal access to mental health and substance use disorder care services.

For more than 15 years, ABHW has been dedicated to improving mental health and substance use disorder care for Americans by advocating for affordable, accessible, and high-quality care through federal legislation and regulations. Mental health and substance use disorder parity, as defined by the [U.S. Department of Labor](#), means that financial requirements, such as copayments, and treatment limits, such as how many visits your insurance will pay for, must be comparable for physical health and mental health/ substance use disorder services.

ABHW and its 11 health plan member companies work internally and externally with health plan customers and policymakers to make mental health and substance use disorder parity an achievable reality and break down the stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use disorders. The survey data emphasizes the increasing importance of the work underway by ABHW and health plans, finding that 62% of respondents agree they prioritize mental health and substance use disorder care more today than they have in the past.

“For far too long, mental health and substance use disorders have been treated as second to physical health in the healthcare system, leaving millions of Americans without the care they need and deserve,” said Pamela Greenberg, President & CEO of the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness. “Our members have worked tirelessly to implement parity over the past 15 years, innovating new approaches and benefits, working to combat provider shortages and lack of access, and driving quality to improve outcomes for patients. ABHW is committed to continue ensuring that mental health and substance use



disorder parity is not just a promise, but a reality. We are determined now more than ever to champion mental health and substance use disorder care for all Americans.”

Consumers are seeking tangible support from their health plans to address their mental health and substance use disorder needs. In fact, 39% of respondents expressed their willingness to pay higher insurance costs for comprehensive mental health and substance use disorder coverage. When asked which were the top services that respondents would be most likely to use if offered by their health plan, 42% of respondents chose telehealth counseling, 32% chose an expanded network of mental health and substance use disorder specialists, and 32% chose mindfulness and meditation programs. ABHW and its health plan members actively champion and enhance access to essential care by advocating for expanded telehealth coverage, diversifying provider networks, and implementing wellness programs. Over the years, ABHW and its members have advocated for and expanded coverage for telehealth services, developed new approaches to widen and diversify its network of providers, and provided programs and guidance for wellness.

ABHW submitted a [comment letter](#) this fall to the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Treasury (Tri-Departments) responding to the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) proposed rule. MHPAEA is landmark federal law requiring mental health and substance use disorder benefits and medical and surgical benefits to be treated equally by insurance plans. ABHW urges regulators to understand that rather than simplifying the process, the latest proposed rule makes parity implementation and compliance for health plans much more complex and, if left unchanged, has the potential to negatively impact health outcomes and quality for patients and increase the cost of care. If these rules are implemented, we risk moving backwards on the road to parity.

“While the pursuit of parity is vital, it cannot be viewed as a standalone solution to all the problems that plague modern-day behavioral health care,” said Greenberg. “We have an opportunity to make real strides for patients in parity implementation and improvements to quality behavioral health care—as our survey so starkly demonstrates is critical for today’s population. ABHW will continue to work with the federal agencies, and other stakeholders like employers, insurers, providers, and consumers, to solve challenges to quality mental health and substance use disorder care.”

For more on ABHW’s efforts and advocacy related to MHPAEA, please visit <https://abhw.org/parity>.

METHODOLOGY

The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness conducted a poll of 1,000 Americans aged between 18-65 years, to gain insights into their challenges and expectations when it comes to accessing mental health and substance use disorder services. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the needs and preferences of consumers when accessing these services, and to gain insights into their experiences with health insurers, health plans, providers, and the healthcare industry as a whole. The survey was conducted by Ipsos.Digital.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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 that care for more than 200 million people. Together, we work to reduce stigma and advance federal policy on mental health and substance use disorder care. ABHW member companies - Aetna Behavioral Health, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, Centene Corporation/Magellan Health, Elevance Health, Evernorth, a Cigna company, Kaiser Permanente, Lucet, Molina Healthcare, Optum, and PerformCare, a subsidiary of AmeriHealth Caritas. To learn more, visit www.abhw.org and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).