



THE ROAD TO PROGRESS

Improving Mental Health and
Substance Use Disorder Care

| Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness



Advancing Health Care Policy for
Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders

■ 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

As I look back at 2023, I am most excited about the progress we continued to make in increasing and improving access to quality behavioral health care. Mental health and substance use disorders are at the forefront of the national discussion and top of mind for policymakers. I am heartened to see that these illnesses are starting to get the attention and resources that they deserve.

Parity remains front and center in our work. As the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) reached its 15th anniversary, regulators issued a new parity rule. If these proposed changes are finalized, they will significantly complicate and change parity implementation, increase costs for patients, and lower quality of care. ABHW successfully achieved an extension from regulators to submit comments to the proposed rule, giving everyone an opportunity to be more thorough in their recommendations. We will persist in our efforts to get changes to the proposed rule before it is finalized.

In addition to parity, ABHW has responded to meet our members' needs by successfully advocating for regulatory provisions, such as making certain COVID-19-related flexibilities permanent. This includes the ability of an opioid treatment program (OTP) to prescribe buprenorphine and methadone for opioid use disorder (OUD) via telehealth without an initial in-person physical evaluation, which is a substantial step towards closing the treatment gap and removing obstacles to care; broadening the list of mental health providers who can be reimbursed by Medicare; and delaying the implementation of the Medicare in-person requirements for behavioral telehealth services, which, if implemented, will limit access to care. ABHW also continues to educate to reduce stigma through our [Stamp Out Stigma](#) initiative and partner with

organizations, such as joining the [Kennedy Forum's Alignment for Progress](#) and committing to enhancing access to evidence-based behavioral health care.

As we look ahead to 2024, there is much to be done to make tele-mental health treatment available without requiring a person to first see a provider in-person, attain a final parity rule that is implementable without jeopardizing the cost or quality of care for patients, and continue expanding the behavioral health workforce. ABHW remains unwavering in our mission to advancing policies that remove barriers to care and we look forward to working with our members to ensure everyone has access to high-quality, affordable mental health and SUD care.



Pamela Greenberg

— PAMELA GREENBERG, MPP
PRESIDENT AND CEO,
ASSOCIATION FOR BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023



1 NEW MEMBERS & CORPORATE PARTNERS

ABHW welcomed one new member, [CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield](#) and 4 new Corporate Partners: [OneFifteen](#), [Owl](#), [Qbtech](#) and [Woebot Health](#).

2 COMMENT LETTERS

ABHW submitted 17 comment letters on timely and relevant issues, such as parity, the confidentiality of SUD records governed by 42 CFR Part 2, network adequacy, tele-behavioral health, and the medications for the safe and effective treatment of opioid use disorder. Read our comment letters [here](#).

3 POLICY MEETINGS

ABHW conducted more than 40 meetings with Congressional offices and federal agencies/departments on the proposed rule for MHPAEA, emergency behavioral health crisis services standards and definitions for 988 implementation, Confidentiality of Substance Use Disorder Patient Records under 42 CFR Part 2 (Part 2), the proposed rule for prescribing of controlled medications via telemedicine, and other issues. Learn more about our policy priorities [here](#).

4 MHPAEA COMMENT PERIOD EXTENSION

ABHW achieved an extension from the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Treasury (collectively, the “Tri-Departments”) on the comment period for the MHPAEA Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Technical Release. Following the release of the MHPAEA proposed rules, ABHW led the sign-on letter effort to request this extension and arranged a meeting with regulators to advocate for an extension. Read ABHW’s [extension letter](#), [comment letter](#), and the [summary](#) of our comment letter. More parity resources can be found [here](#).



TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

5 NEW MENTAL HEALTH PARITY SURVEY

ABHW conducted its first Mental Health Parity Survey, which surveyed over 1,000 adults (age 18-65 years) in the U.S. to understand their attitudes and preferences surrounding 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 plans, providers, and the behavioral healthcare industry as a whole. The survey was written about in **6 news articles** and was part of a larger ABHW initiative that resulted in the creation of an online [resource center](#) on MHPAEA and a compilation of [member case studies](#).

6 A NEW & ONGOING STORYBANK

ABHW's Stamp Out Stigma (SOS) launched an ongoing storybank for individuals who would like to share their stories on mental health and substance use disorders. While mental health has made its way to the forefront of national discussion, stigma continues to be pervasive in many communities. SOS' mission is to reshape how we talk about mental health and substance use disorders. SOS is not just collecting stories—we're amplifying voices that have long been silenced. These stories are a testament to the storytellers' strength and courage and a source of empowerment for others. You can read the stories [here](#) and share your story [here](#).

7 SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

ABHW staff's 11 speaking engagements included the Milken Institute Future of Health Summit, AHIP Health Policy and Markets Forum, National Council of Insurance Legislators, National Alliance for Healthcare Purchasers Annual Forum, and thINc360.



TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

8 IN THE PRESS

ABHW was quoted or written about in 33 articles, including Behavioral Health Business, Bloomberg, Psychology Today, and Mental Health Weekly. ABHW also authored *Parity in the Spotlight: Addressing the Growing Need for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Care*; *The Road to Achieving Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity: Are We About to Take a Wrong Turn?* with co-author James Gelfand, President and CEO of The ERISA Industry Committee (ERIC), and *Recovery In Action* with co-author Marti Taylor, President and CEO of OneFifteen.

9 ANNUAL SUMMIT

ABHW co-sponsored its annual Advancing Behavioral Health and Policy Summit with event partner, Validation Institute. The summit had 140 attendees and 47 speakers from various government and private sector organizations, including Department of Labor, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Mental Health America, National Council for Mental Wellbeing, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Office of National Drug Control Policy, among others. For information about ABHW's 2024 Advancing Behavioral Health and Policy Summit, visit the event [website](#).

10 TOPICAL WEBINARS

ABHW hosted 8 webinars, on topics such as the functions and implications of the Psychology Interjurisdictional Licensing Compact (PSYPACT) with the American Psychological Association (APA); rethinking mental health network adequacy with professors from Yale School of Public Health and the New York University Langone Health; and understanding the MHPAEA proposed rules, technical release, and the 2023 Report to Congress with Epstein Becker Green.



ABHW MENTAL HEALTH PARITY SURVEY RESULTS

ABHW is dedicated to improving mental health and substance use disorder care for Americans. Learn more about our work [here](#).

82%

agree that the healthcare industry should give mental health and substance use disorder care the same priority as physical healthcare.

84%

feel it is important to ensure fair and equal access to mental health and substance use disorder care services.

62%

agree they prioritize mental health and substance use disorder care more today than they have in the past.

39%

express their willingness to pay higher insurance costs for comprehensive mental health and substance use disorder coverage.

THE TOP SERVICES that respondents would be most likely to use, if offered by their health plan:

42%

telehealth
counseling

32%

an expanded network
of mental health and
substance use disorder
specialists

32%

mindfulness and
meditation programs

■ ABHW MEMBERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice President, Regulatory Affairs
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Director, Public Policy
Manager, Behavioral Health and
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Treasurer of the Board
President
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■ **LEARN MORE** — visit us at [ABHW.org](https://www.abhw.org)

ABOUT ABHW

The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) advocates on behalf of health plans for improved access and higher quality mental health and substance use disorder care, ensuring better health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Founded in 1994, ABHW is dedicated to shifting the paradigm in treatment and policies for mental health and substance use disorders to support access to quality care, improve overall health outcomes, and advance solutions for public health challenges. Our members are health plans that care for over 200 million people and share our commitment to excellence in mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

2023 CORPORATE PARTNERS

- Alkermes
- CHES Health
- COMPASS Pathways
- Embark Behavioral Health
- Indivior
- Johnson & Johnson
- OneFifteen
- Owl
- Pear Therapeutics
- PsychHub
- Qbtech
- Woebot Health

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