



# BUILDING A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Advancing Mental Health and  
Substance Use Disorder Solutions

| Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

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# A Note from the President and CEO

The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) oversaw many achievements in 2024, and it is an honor to have been selected as ABHW President and CEO, officially succeeding the highly respected Pamela Greenberg in October 2024. ABHW has made strides in behavioral health for patients in 2024, including improving substance use disorder services, promoting telehealth to expand access to care, and bolstering the national crisis response and services. My predecessor, our members, other ABHW partner organizations, and staff have contributed to the strong foundation on which we stand today. I am excited to build upon this legacy and ensure a coordinated system that delivers high quality care and puts the consumer at the heart of that delivery model.



*DEBBIE WITHEY*

**Debbie Withey**

President and CEO

Association for Behavioral  
Health and Wellness

# TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS

## FROM 2024

1

### Championing Enhanced Substance Use Disorder Services

ABHW led the movement to modernize 42 CFR Part 2 (“Part 2”), the privacy law that governs the way that substance use disorder records are managed. ABHW founded the Partnership to Amend 42 CFR Part 2 (“Partnership”), a coalition of 50 organizations representing stakeholders from across the health care spectrum, and advocated for aligning substance use disorder privacy protections with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The legislation was passed in 2020 in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The rule implementing the law was finalized in 2024. ABHW and the Partnership celebrated the Part 2 reforms with co-host and Partnership member, Netsmart Technologies. Hill staff, members of the Partnership, representatives from ABHW member companies, and ABHW staff attended the reception to acknowledge and celebrate this successful effort. You can view photos from the event [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).



On February 2, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) issued a final rule on the Medications for the Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder that updates certain regulations for Opioid Treatment Programs (OTP) and the standards for the treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD). ABHW successfully advocated to make certain COVID-19-related flexibilities permanent, including take-home doses of methadone, the ability of an OTP to prescribe buprenorphine and methadone for OUD via telehealth without an initial in-person physical evaluation, and the removal of specific requirements for admission to an OTP to better align with evidence-based practice.



## 2

### Advancing Telehealth for Greater Access to Care

ABHW co-hosted a briefing titled “Telehealth Access & the Mental Health Crisis” with the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The discussion examined the telehealth legislative landscape, obstacles and opportunities specific to mental health care, and potential federal policies that can address the crisis.

In November, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) released the third temporary extension of telehealth prescribing of controlled medications following the advocacy efforts of ABHW and other partners. This is a one-year extension through December 31, 2025 to allow providers to prescribe Schedule II-V controlled medications without seeing a patient in-person.

Additionally, ABHW successfully advocated for the extension of key telehealth provisions, including extending the use of Medicare telehealth and delaying a requirement for an in-person visit within six months of a telehealth visit.



## 3

### Strengthening National Crisis Response and Services

ABHW participated on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)’s Training and Technical Assistance Center advisory board and in workgroups that developed the Model Behavioral Health Crisis Services Definitions and the updated SAMHSA National Behavioral Health Crisis Care Guidance, which came out in January 2025. Read more about [this](#).

ABHW successfully advocated to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to adopt new rules requiring all wireless carriers to implement geo-routing. ABHW continues to advocate for geo-routing issues, such as supporting geo-routing for 988 text messages to improve support for populations with an increased risk of suicide. Learn more in our [comment letter](#) to the FCC.

## 4

## Making Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity an Achievable Reality

ABHW provided key advice to support workable implementation of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) law and successfully eliminated some provisions in the final rule that were unreasonably burdensome and would not advance quality care.

As a result of ABHW's advocacy, the National Conference of Insurance Legislators (NCOIL) Joint State-Federal Relations & International Insurance Issues Committee updated the Mental Health Parity Model Act to contain only the mental health wellness exam language, removing all other provisions. Read our [written testimony](#) advocating for substantial changes to the initial Mental Health Parity Model Act and our [joint letter](#) with AHIP and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) successfully requesting that the 45-minute visit length mandate for the behavioral health wellness exam be removed and licensed medical and mental health professionals be able to perform wellness exams.

ABHW successfully led the effort for an extension for comments on the CMS Parity Compliance Tools to effectively address the issues raised in the templates and instructional guides. The Alliance for Community Health Plans (ACHP) and BCBSA signed onto the [letter](#) requesting the extension.



## 5 Record-Breaking Media Highlights

ABHW was in the news 41 times, making this the most press mentions in last 6 years and providing multiple opportunities to place our perspectives in front of policymakers.

## 6 Spearheading Pivotal Discussions

ABHW held its annual Advancing Behavioral Health and Policy Summit, which brought together leaders from health plans, providers, employers, government and public health agencies, and advocacy organizations to discuss major initiatives and the driving forces to advance behavioral health. Read more about the [summit](#).

ABHW hosted 8 webinars on timely topics such as insurance coverage for coordinated specialty care for early psychosis; an overview of the new Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI)'s Innovation in Behavioral Health (IBH) Model; building the future of

behavioral health with artificial intelligence; trends in the fentanyl era and what plans need to know regarding overdose prevention, patient access, and criminal justice populations; what role psychedelics play in the future of behavioral health; and our annual State of the Union address.

ABHW staff's 7 speaking engagements included NatCon24, Future of Mental Healthcare East, thINc360 (watch our session on [C-SPAN](#)), and ATA EDGE Policy Conference 2024: The Telehealth Policy Imperative.





## 7

## Influencing the Policy Conversation

ABHW published [\*The State of Children and Youth Behavioral Health: Solutions by Congress, the Administration, and Health Plans\*](#), a report that underscores the importance of early intervention and access to comprehensive, evidence-based care for positive long-term outcomes. In the report, ABHW also features highlights from member companies about programs and initiatives they are involved with to help improve children and youth behavioral health.

ABHW authored 4 [blog articles](#) on key issues impacting behavioral health, including the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) and the importance of removing the in-person visit requirement for telemental health services in Medicare.



## 8

## Shaping National Discourse and Reducing Stigma

ABHW's [Stamp Out Stigma](#) expanded its [person-centered language guide](#) to help people communicate appropriately about mental illness and substance use disorders; launched a quarterly newsletter with timely resources and updates; published 3 new webpages for Mental Health Awareness Month, [Suicide Prevention](#), and [Substance Use Disorders](#); authored 4 blog articles for Suicide Prevention Month; and developed 2 communications toolkits for Mental Health Awareness Month and Suicide Prevention Month.

## 9

## Strengthening Networks and Fostering Partnerships

ABHW continues to collaborate with a robust network of organizations to promote solutions to increase access and improve the quality of mental health and substance use disorder care. These partnerships in 2024 included participating in the Kennedy Forum's Alignment for Progress, collaborating with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) for National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week (NDAFW), joining the Better Medicare Alliance (BMA) on advocating for protecting the Medicare Advantage program, working with over 70 behavioral health organizations in coalition with the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), and contributing to Action Alliance in getting CMS billing codes and Medicare payment for Safety Planning Intervention (SPI) and Follow-up Contacts Intervention (FCI) across the finish line.

## 10

## New Corporate Partners

[Boehringer-Ingelheim](#), [Brightside](#), [Guardian Recovery](#), and [Rula](#) joined ABHW as Corporate Partners in 2024.





# ABHW

# CORPORATE PARTNERS

ABHW's Corporate Partners Program focuses on supporting crucial behavioral health issues. Our Corporate Partners have the opportunity to advise health plans about their public policy interests, focus on areas of common interest, and engage with key behavioral health executives to ensure access to quality care and improve overall health outcomes.

## 2024 CORPORATE PARTNERS

Boehringer Ingelheim

Brightside

COMPASS Pathways

Indivior

Guardian Recovery

Johnson & Johnson

Owl/NeuroFlow

Rula

Qbtech

Woebot Health



# ABHW MEMBER COMPANIES

ABHW members include top national and regional health plans that care for 200 million people in both the public and private sectors. Our member companies bring substantial knowledge and experience with mental health and substance use disorders, integration, patient-centered treatment, and recovery and lead the industry in preventative and collaborative models of care.

## MEMBERS

Aetna, A CVS Health Company

CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

Carelon Behavioral Health, an Elevance Company

Centene Corporation

Evernorth

Kaiser Permanente

Lucet

Magellan Health

Molina Healthcare

Optum

PerformCare, a subsidiary of

AmeriHealth Caritas



# ABOUT ABHW

The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) is dedicated to advancing policy and raising awareness on mental health and substance use disorders. By advocating and promoting solutions on behalf of health plans to ensure everyone has access to high quality, evidence-based care, we are focused on reducing disparities and ensuring better outcomes for whole-person care for all individuals and communities.

ABHW is the national voice for payers that manage behavioral health insurance benefits. ABHW member companies provide coverage to 200 million people in both the public and private sectors to treat mental health, substance use disorders, and other behaviors that impact health and wellness.

Founded in 1994, ABHW is a respected leader in the behavioral health and medical arena. Poised to effect positive policy change, ABHW provides thought leadership and advocates for regulations and policies that help provide high quality health care to promote healthy living and improved quality of life.

## ABHW Guiding Pillars



Increase access to timely, quality, and appropriate care



Foster evidence-based treatment and innovation



Drive integration



Raise awareness and reduce stigma



Support prevention



Advance health equity





## **For more information**

Please visit our website at [abhw.org](http://abhw.org) or email us at [info@abhw.org](mailto:info@abhw.org).