AS COVID CONTINUES...

With the State Legislature handling the COVID public health emergency, many bills we were watching have been put on hold for the better part of 2020. And for good reason; APA recently put out a thoughtful statement about the ongoing COVID pandemic and its effects on the US population. You may find the statement here: https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/08/covid-policy-statement.pdf.

Highlights include:
• The pandemic has cast a bright light on the destructive effects of health, educational, employment, legal, and criminal justice disparities and inequities.
• A confluence of forces – a rapidly spreading and dangerous disease, coupled with widespread anti-racism protests and a pre-existing mental health crisis – interact synergistically and have a disproportionate impact on marginalized populations.
• Psychological interventions, such as psychotherapy, targeting specific stressors and symptoms are critical components of an interprofessional approach to addressing the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic.
• Psychological interventions reinforced by effective communication strategies are needed across populations and settings to increase engagement in COVID-19 testing, social isolation, wearing of masks, and other PPE (when accessible).
• Supporting families and developing safety nets in schools is a critical strategy for treating the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-related stress in families.

The expertise and diversity of the psychology field – which includes clinicians, researchers, educators, and consultants across numerous specialty areas – offers the synergy to develop compelling solutions to challenges arising from this global pandemic, including the disparities and inequities that have been exacerbated across our health, educational, employment, legal, and criminal justice systems.
Calls to Action

Your IPA Legislative Committee is requesting you contact your legislators on the following issues:

1. In support of House Resolution 844 – see previous feature
2. To waive budget neutrality for implementation of the new Evaluation/Management (E/M) codes for CMS

Your help in supporting these initiatives is needed to protect the practice.

See the features on HR 844 and the E/M codes in CMS in this newsletter for more details.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

To reach Senator Tammy Duckworth: www.duckworth.senate.gov.

To reach Senator Richard Durbin: https://www.durbin.senate.gov/coronavirus-contact

To find your Congressional Representative: https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative

You can also head here to send a message to your Congresspeople!

WHAT DO I SAY?

We often get questions about calling leaders; specifically, what should you say when you contact them? It is easiest and best to keep your comments simple, such as

For HR844:

“I am a constituent of the Representative, and I support HR844

“I support the physician definition for Psychologists.”

“Please support defining Clinical Psychologists as physicians in Medicare.”

For the CMS issue:

“Please waive budget neutrality for CMS in 2021.”

“I urge you to prevent deep Medicare cuts in the next budget.”

The staffers who answer your call may have questions for you about your zip code or how to spell your last name; this is to confirm you are a constituent and that they pass along information accurately, You will not be asked about specific aspects of the bill and you do not need to be an expert on legislation to support a certain bill. Staffers will keep tabs on the number of calls in support they receive every day.
Some Major Strides for Mental Health

Some legislative efforts – especially those outside of COVID temporary permissions - been slow in 2020. Still, major strides have been made in the practice of psychology at both the State and Federal levels.

President Trump’s Executive Order of August 3 (see https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-improving-rural-health-telehealth-access/) encourages CMS to develop innovative payment mechanisms for providers, review the infrastructure needs of rural Americans, and review the current public health emergency temporary measures in order to consider extension. While no explicit details are provided in the order, your Legislative Committee and APA will be watching closely for these reports from CMS, HHS and other government agencies, anticipated in the next 30-60 days.

Related, as of May 2020, CMS has recognized the authority of Medicare-enrolled psychologists to practice under PSYPACT (see https://www.apaservices.org/practice/legal/technology/psypact-licensure-requirements#:~:text=PSYPACT%20legislation%20has%20been%20enacted,Oklahoma%2C%20Texas%2C%20and%20Utah). This greatly increases the network of available providers to underserved Americans. Overcoming infrastructure barriers so that rural and underserved urban populations can better access Telehealth services is the next crucial step in making high-quality healthcare available to many.
At the Federal Level, APA is working hard to advocate for practitioner rights.

**APA’s advocacy work helped set a precedent to keep insurance companies from demanding exorbitant recoupments and record keeping standards not outlined in provider contracts**

After much back and forth with Wellmark BCBS of Iowa, the private insurer withdrew a slew of demands for recoupment amounts nearing or in excess of $100,000, based on undocumented requirements for paperwork and outdated assumptions about medical necessity. This action did not require legislation or court involvement but did make clear that Psychologists cannot be harassed for simply providing services as contracted. Such a precedent will help in any legal involvement that may come the future.

**APA teams with The Kennedy Forum in support of the Medicare Mental Health Access Act (HR 884)**

In August, The Kennedy Forum - a national organization working to decrease stigma and barriers to mental health care access - issued a statement in support of Clinical Psychologists and House Resolution 884:

**HR 884** would allow psychologists to work independently with inpatient Medicare beneficiaries. Medicare is the only reimbursing entity that restricts a psychologists’ independence by disregarding the autonomy granted by a psychologists’ state license. Currently, inpatient psychologists require physician orders and oversight to work with Medicare beneficiaries. However, no other federal reimbursement system requires this inappropriate oversight, including VA, Tricare, or Medicare Advantage. There is no such barrier in Medicaid or private insurance.

Congressional action on this bill would eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate physician oversight and improve access to psychologists’ expertise without the requirement of a physician order. The Medicare Mental Health Access Act would allow patients to engage in psychological services as needed rather than delaying vital care when a physician may not be available to affirm these beneficial services.

**Contact your Congresspeople today in support of these initiatives!**
Congrats to the newly credentialed PSYPACT Psychologists!

Gloria Arfelis
Carole Berk
Amy Bilka
Lori Bolnick
Tyree Brinson
Amy Brown
Michelle Chaban
Carroll Cradock
Rebecca De Nosaquo
Jennifer Diamond
Bruce Frumkin
Corrie Goldberg
Lisa Grossman
Mitchell Hicks

David Hoover
Leah Horvath
Sharon Khurana
Kin Kobus
Donna Lettieri-Marks
Joanne Marengo
Marie Naumann
Kristina Pecora
Derek Philips
Andrea Platt
Scott Pytluk
Diane Rosenbaum
Aaron Weiner
Chris Yoo

A reminder that ASPPB has generously waived the $400 application fee for the E-Passport for the rest of 2020.

Visit illinoispsychology.org/legislative-activity/ any time for updates on how we represent you and the practice!