

November 6, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

The undersigned organizations urge the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions to consider the Temporary Reciprocity to Ensure Access to Treatment (TREAT) Act (H.R. 8283/S.4421), which would increase access to health care during the national public health emergency by allowing health care practitioners with a valid practitioners' license to provide services, including telehealth services, in all states for the duration of the public health emergency.

The health care system has been stretched thin during the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening pre-existing provider shortages. The United States needs a strong health care workforce to effectively combat COVID-19 and its accompanying conditions.¹ Furthermore, this increased shortage worsens a prior problem in the mental health and substance use disorder field, as over 75% of U.S. counties have severe shortages of mental health providers, which is particularly acute among rural and disadvantaged communities.²

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation Tracking Poll conducted in mid-July, 53% of adults in the U.S. reported that their mental health had been negatively impacted by worry and stress over COVID-19. Only 32% of U.S. adults reported the same in March. Many adults are also reporting specific negative impacts on their overall mental health and well-being due to worry and stress over the coronavirus, including difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic mental health conditions (12%).³ In addition, the report stated that ongoing and necessary public health measures expose many people to situations linked to poor mental health outcomes, such as isolation and job loss.⁴ Last, one-third of all telehealth claims made in June were mental health claims.⁵

The TREAT Act aims to increase access to important health services during this time by temporarily permitting health professionals to practice across state lines. The bill states that a

¹ New AAMC Report Confirms Growing Physician Shortage. (2020, June 26). Retrieved from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-aamc-report-confirms-growing-physician-shortage>.

² Macher, D., Seidman, J., Gooding, M., & Diamond, C. (2020, May 11). *COVID-19 is Stressing a Fractured Mental Healthcare System in the US*. <https://avalere.com/insights/covid-19-is-stressing-a-fractured-mental-healthcare-system-in-the-us>.

³ Panchal, N., Kamal, R., Orgera, K., Cox, C., Garfield, R., Hamel, L., . . . Chidambaram, P. (2020, August 21). The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ FAIR Health. (2020). Monthly Telehealth Regional Tracker, June 2020.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media2.fairhealth.org/infographic/telehealth/june-2020-national-telehealth.pdf>

provider who holds a valid license in any state (and is not barred in another state) can practice in accordance with applicable state law in every state during the national public health emergency, as well as for a 180-day transition period after the declaration is lifted. Additionally, the Secretary could use this authority upon declaring a public health emergency when the president also has declared an emergency under the National Emergencies Act or the Stafford Act for at least 12 states.

The TREAT Act will improve access to providers of all kinds, including mental health providers, by allowing individuals in areas experiencing shortages to access providers across the country. The legislation will provide increased flexibility for providers, potentially raising the number of providers willing and able to work. For these reasons, we urge you to bring the TREAT Act forward for consideration in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Thank you for your efforts to protect and expand Americans' access to important and necessary health services during this national emergency. We look forward to continuing to work with you to address mental health care needs throughout the country.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Geriatric
Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and
Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in
Clinical Social Work

American Association of Suicidology

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Assoc.

American Psychoanalytic Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of
America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral
Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and
Wellness

Centerstone

Children and Adults with Attention-
Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Clinical Social Work Association

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic
Pharmacists (CPNP)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research,
Policy & Action

Education Development Center

EMDR International Association

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and
Social Justice

Inseparable

International OCD Foundation

Jewish Federations of North America

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Behavioral Healthcare

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Social Workers

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

Postpartum Support International

Psychotherapy Action Network Advocacy

Residential Eating Disorders Consortium

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America

SMART Recovery

The Trevor Project

Treatment Communities of America

Well Being Trust