

7/24/2020

Good Evening REDC Members,

Below is your weekly policy update—a very heavy telehealth last two weeks! Before we dive in, I wanted to alert members that the Eating Disorders Coalition Research, Policy & Action will be hosting a **virtual Advocacy Day** this year and registration is open. **[You can register here to “attend” on Wednesday, September 23.](#)** Registration closes on Friday, August 19.

- I. **COVID-19 Relief Package Updates**
 - a. **White House & Senate GOP Release Outline of Relief Package**
 - i. Republicans are still in negotiations with the White House on final details of the next relief package.
 - ii. The package is expected by Monday/Tuesday and we anticipate it to be very partisan.
 - iii. The “blueprint” is attached, but we have heard that what is listed on the document has already changed substantially. We advise you read it with a grain of salt.
 1. We anticipate a busy week of negotiations to get a bill passed in the Senate by the end of the week before they leave for August recess.
 2. This will force the Democratic-controlled House to make the hard choice of passing whatever the Senate passes or playing hard ball and pass a bill with changes that would force the Senate to come back into session to vote again on the bill.
 - iv. We do expect telehealth provisions to be included in some form, but we have not been given any indication of what that will look like.
 - b. **Administration Extends National Emergency Declaration**
 - i. The declaration continues for another 90 days.

ii. This is critical to maintain a number of the flexibilities and deregulations that have take place in the health care arena.

c. **Telehealth Legislative Developments**

i. **Protecting Access to Post-COVID-19 Telehealth Act (H.R. 7673)** led by the [Congressional Telehealth Caucus](#) (bipartisan) and endorsed by all the large telehealth groups was introduced last week and gaining steam with potential inclusion or partial inclusion within the next relief package.

1. Eliminates most geographic/originating site restrictions for Medicare telehealth, including the patient's home.
2. Allows Medicare telehealth services to continue 90 days beyond the end of the public health emergency.
3. Makes permanent the disaster waiver authority, which enables HHS to expand telehealth in Medicare for future emergencies.
4. Requires a study on the use of telehealth during COVID

ii. **Telehealth Expansion Act of 2020 led by Senate Finance Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR)**

1. Similar to H.R. 7673 above, but goes farther.
2. Would allow all mental health services and commonplace medical visits (know as evaluation and management (E/M services) available through telehealth permanently.
3. Patient's home becomes an originating site 9 million Medicare patients used telehealth in the period between mid-March and mid-June, and more than 3 million of those had audio-only visits.

iii. **Ways & Means Committee Republicans Release Keeping Medicare Patients' Improved Access to Care Through Telehealth**

1. Allows home as an originating site
2. Allows physical therapists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists to permanently allow delivery of care via telehealth
3. Permanently allow audio-only services
4. Includes HSA flexibilities, home dialysis care and survey on fraud among other items

d. **Rep. Kennedy (D-MA) Unveils Universal Mental Health Care Resolution**

i. The REDC endorsed the following resolution from the Congressman and was featured in the [press release here](#).

ii. The resolution outlines the disjointed federal response to the MH/SUD crisis, outlines the urgent policies needed to combat it and demands an immediate, historic investment in the health care system that focuses specifically on behavioral health conditions.

e. **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Makes Permanent Telehealth Policy Changes**

i. The insurer says it plans to permanently pay for mental health visits over the phone or video at the same rates as in-person.

ii. As there is widespread concern that insurers (including Medicare) could abruptly end telehealth coverage, Ron Yee, chief medical officer at the National Association of Community Health Center posited that whether providers keep telehealth or revert to in-person visits may depend on their access to PPE for safely reopening.

1. If states do not support continued reimbursement for telehealth visits, virtual visits, or brief consultations, check-ins, they're going to start going back to traditional visits sooner.

f. **REDC Co-Signs Letter to Include Cultural Competent COVID Health Materials in Next Relief Package (letter attached)**

i. The letter was led by the Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

ii. The letter is addressed to House/Senate leadership urging a dedication of resources and oversight to ensure language and communications needs are not a barrier to COVID-19 public health knowledge, testing and treatment.

II. **General Updates/Resources**

a. **Suicide Prevention Online Conference (free)**

i. The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) has partnered with the Mental Health Academy (MHA) and the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) to sponsor the world's largest Suicide Prevention free online conference, the "2020 Suicide Prevention Summit," on **August 29-30, at 9:00 AM EDT each day.**

ii. The purpose of the Summit is to equip practicing mental health professionals in the United States with the most up-to-date, advanced knowledge and treatment options for suicide prevention.

iii. Register

here: <https://www.mentalhealthacademy.net/suicideprevention/amhca>

Best,

Allison