

02/26/2021

Good Morning REDC Members,

Thank you to Jillian Lampert of The Emily Program and Gayle Brooks for The Renfrew Center for serving as moderator and speaker for our Congressional briefing earlier this week!

We had incredible attendance for the briefing with 186 attendees, including 66 Congressional staff.

## **I. SERVE Act Update**

- A House bill number was assigned for the SERVE Act, H.R. 1309 and can be found on Congress.gov [here](#).
- Since introduction earlier this week, we have gained 5 more additional cosponsors including, Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) who sits on the House Armed Services Committee.

## **II. Budget Reconciliation & COVID Relief**

- The House passed the latest COVID relief package this morning and now it heads to the Senate.
- The package is expected to change given the process of reconciliation and what provisions pass muster with the Senate Parliamentarian.
- COBRA subsidies are expected to be challenged by Senate Republicans (as they were included within the House bill through September 2021).
  - Current provision is 85% subsidy with the remaining 15% on the individual.
  - A union representing 300,000 workers in the hospitality sector are pushing lawmakers to make the subsidies more generous with a subsidy increase to 100%.
- The bill is expected to head to conference to sort out final differences with the House and Senate.
  - Democrats' goal is to have the bill on the President's desk before March 14 when extended unemployment benefits expire.
- The Children's Hospital Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics is launching a campaign aimed at raising awareness of the pandemic's impact on children's mental and behavioral health.
  - The campaign will seek new federal funding for a range of children's health initiatives, including bolstering crisis response training, school-based services, and outpatient programs and primary and telehealth availability.
  - Hospitalizations at children's hospitals related to suicide attempts rose nearly 20% this past summer, while disruptive behavior disorders jumped more than 40%.

- That's accelerated a pre-existing trend, they argue, as hospitalizations and ER visits for suicide attempts doubled at children's hospitals from 2008 to 2015.

### III. Telehealth

- One of the confirmation hearings for HHS Secretary nominee Xavier Becerra was earlier this week.
  - During the hearing, Becerra assured senators that he is committed to permanently expanding payment policies that boosted telehealth during the pandemic stating, "I wholeheartedly believe that we're going to be doing an expansion of telehealth...Covid has taught us so much...If we don't learn from Covid how telehealth can help save lives, then we're in trouble. So I think we are going to advance."
    - See a clip on the exchange between Becerra and Senator Moran (R-KS) on telehealth payment parity and overall expansion of telehealth [here](#).
- The REDC finalized a series of letters this week that are attached for reference.
  - The REDC led the Mental Health Liaison Group support letter for the TREAT Act, which would temporarily allow practitioners to provide care across state lines during the duration of the pandemic.
  - The REDC led a thank you letter to Acting HHS Secretary Cochran on his recent guidance to governors about the Public Health Emergency declaration remaining through the end of 2021. The letter was co-signed by members of the Mental Health Liaison Group.
  - The REDC led a letter to Texas Governor Abbott and the Department of the Insurance Commissioner regarding concerns with telehealth coverage in the state.
    - The letter was also sent to state representative Tom Oliverson who is leading a telehealth coverage bill; and the entire Texas Congressional delegation.
    - We received interest from this letter by Representative Dan Crenshaw's (R-TX) office in preparation for an upcoming hearing on telehealth on Tuesday within the Energy & Commerce Committee.

### IV. ACA

- Republicans are going quiet on the ACA now that GOP-backed challenge to the law doesn't appear to be a major threat and the repeal and replace fight of 10 years has not come to fruition.
- Republicans attacks on Democrats pursuing a "government takeover" of health care through a single-payer system don't quite make the cut as President Biden has made clear he has no intention of pursuing Medicare for All.

- It is anticipated that the health care message for Republicans as the 2022 election cycle nears is arguing about the deficit, that could bring battles over Medicare and Medicaid.

Wishing everyone a nice weekend,  
Center Road Solutions Team