

05/21/2021

Good Afternoon REDC Members,

Here is your policy update for the week:

I. SERVE Act

- New Co-Sponsor: Rep. Veasey (D-TX) who sits on the Subcommittee for Military Personnel on the House Armed Services Committee
- We're working on coordinating a call with the Department of Defense to discuss the April 2021 letter from REDC to DoD on the issues in SERVE and beyond.
- The House NDAA will be delayed until September according to sources.
 - However, the Senate believes its still on par for a July vote, but that may change to a later date when the President releases his budget next Friday.

II. Telehealth

- **Kaiser Family Foundation Telehealth Brief**
 - KFF released telehealth statistics earlier this week that showed 1 in 4 Medicare beneficiaries had a telehealth visit between summer and fall 2020.
 - As some have worried about the digital divide blocking access for some patients, the brief found:
 - Black patients are more than 12 percentage points more likely than white patients to have a physician who doesn't offer telehealth
 - White patients are more likely to own the technology to access telehealth
 - 71% of white Medicare beneficiaries own a computer vs. 42% of Black patients and 34% of Hispanic ones.
 - The full brief can be read [here](#).
- **Senate Finance Committee Hearing, "COVID-19 Health Care Flexibilities: Perspectives, Experiences, and Lessons Learned"**
 - The hearing earlier this week featured Congress and provider still agitating for greater, and permanent, reimbursement for telehealth.
 - "Telehealth has been a lifeline for patients and providers, especially in the early months of the pandemic," stated Ranking Member Crapo (R-ID). The pandemic provided a "test project on a scale few could have imagined, but it's important that we gather evidence on its impact on access, quality and cost."
 - Loving the concept of telehealth while having qualms about its potential cost is the current position of many lawmakers.

- Testifying on behalf of America's Physician Groups, Narayana Murali, a WI-based clinic executive said, "Embracing telehealth and stopping its backslide is critical."

III. COVID-19

• Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Release Mental Health Data

- CMS' data highlights the continued impact COVID-19 is having on Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries and utilization of services.
- Data shows that from March 2020, beneficiaries have forgone millions of primary, preventive and mental health care visits due to the pandemic, compared to the same time period in 2019.
- Although utilization rates for some treatments have rebounded, mental health services show the slowest rebound.
 - Key highlights:
 - 34% decline in number of mental health services utilized by children under age 19
 - 22% decline in number of mental health services utilized by adults aged 19 to 64.
 - This translates to 14 million fewer mental health services for children and 12 million fewer mental health services for adults.

• HHS Announces \$3 Billion in American Rescue Plan Funding

- HHS is distributing \$3 billion in American Rescue Plan funding--the largest aggregate amount of funding to date for its mental health and substance use block grant programs.
- The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Program and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program will disperse \$1.5 billion each to states and territories, with the latter also awarding money to tribes.
- HHS Assistant Secretary Rachel Levine stated, "Across America, we are seeing a startling rise in mental health and substance use disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic. We know multiple stressors during the pandemic--isolation, sickness, grief, job loss, food instability, and loss of routines--have devastated many Americans and presented the unprecedented behavioral health challenges across the nation."

IV. Health Insurance

• New Kaiser Family Foundation Analysis on Lowering Medicare Eligibility to 60

- Lowering the age of Medicare eligibility to 60 could improve the affordability of coverage for people who are already insured and expand coverage to over a million of the nation's 30 million uninsured.

- This policy could provide a path to Medicare coverage for up to 11.7 million people with employer-based insurance and 2.4 million with private, non-group coverage who are ages 60-64. Another 1.6 million people age 60-64 are uninsured and would be eligible for Medicare.
- The KFF brief can be read in full [here.](#)
- **Health Reimbursement Arrangements Defense**
 - Insurers, brokers, consultants and health reimbursement plan administrators are banding together to defend a Trump-era policy that allowed companies to move their works onto the ACA markets.
 - The group, called the HRA Council, is being aided by former Trump official Brian Blase, who helped write the policy.
 - Keep US Covered, an advocacy group that opposes "federal rules that incentivize weaker health benefits for workers and promote junk coverage," is pressing the Biden administration to rescind the policy.

Have a happy weekend!

Allison & the Center Road Solutions Team