

06/04/2021

Good Evening REDC Members,

We look forward to seeing many of you at Wednesday's all member meeting! In the meantime, below is your policy update for the week:

I. SERVE Act & Other DoD Updates

- The President's Budget was released last Friday, which was the long awaited item for the House and Senate to begin working on the NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act)
 - Timeline for these markups are in July for the Senate (which may be punted to September) and September for the House given the delay in the President's budget
- **SERVE Act**
 - We have a meeting with leadership in the Defense Health Agency with the TRICARE for Kids Coalition scheduled for mid-June, where we will be adding more pressure around implementing the SERVE Act provisions from last year's NDAA.
 - **Recent Lobbying Meetings:** Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN), Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Rep. Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), Rep. Chris Jacobs (R-NY), Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI)
- **In Progress:**
 - Working on vetting experts to have a meeting with the Department of Defense on the REDC letter requesting implementation of SERVE as well as addressing other elements like overdue payments for contracting, body composition standards, training for direct care providers, etc.
- **For those working with Autism and TRICARE:**
 - DoD posted a Q & A on May 24th on changes to the Autism Care Demonstration project that may be helpful: <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Conditions-and-Treatments/Comprehensive-Changes-to-the-Autism-Care-Demonstration>. However we've heard from the autism community that it raises more questions than answers.

II. Telehealth

- **American Telehealth Association Bill Tracking**
 - The association is tracking roughly 600 bills--6x its usual workload, with many of those permanently extending measures that helped the once-niche industry explode into a major player.
- **Texas Passes Medicaid Telehealth Bill**
 - Legislation recently passed in TX permanently allows Medicaid to cover telehealth, including audio-only services.
- **Massachusetts Plans to End State of Emergency**

- Governor Baker plans to end his state of emergency June 15.
- The MA Medical Society, a trade group representing physicians, is pushing to extend a COVID-era rule that required doctors be paid the same for telehealth and in-person visits by Medicaid and private insurers.
 - Those parity rules were extended permanently for mental health and through the end of 2022 for primary care doctors and patients with certain chronic conditions.
 - For other providers, the equal pay ends in mid-September, 90 days after the emergency order expires.
- **Medicare Beneficiaries & Telehealth Use**
 - A [Kaiser Family Foundation analysis](#) found that 1 in 4 Medicare beneficiaries had a telehealth visit between the summer and fall of 2020.
 - 56% of Medicare beneficiaries who had a telehealth visit report accessing care using only a phone.
 - There was no difference in reported rates of telehealth use between beneficiaries in traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage.

III. Health Insurance

- **Biden Administration Budget Calls for Public Option**
 - The Biden Administration's budget calls for creating a federal public-run health insurance option in the holdout states that have not expanded Medicaid.
- **Nevada Assembly Passed Public-Option Bill**
 - The NV Assembly passed legislation to put the state on pace to become the second state to create a public-option health plan on its ACA exchange.
 - If the modifications made by the House from the Senate passed bill, pass muster with the Senate, the plan would go into effect in 2026.
 - The plan would be a hybrid of government management and private health plan participation.
 - Any insurer participating in the NV Medicaid program would have to bid to offer a public plan option on the state exchange, and it would have to cost less than other health plans on the exchange in year 1.
 - The legislation does require a study of the economic impact, and would eventually need federal approval.

IV. Parity

- **Parity Top Priority for Biden Administration**
 - Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration, Ali Khawar stated

ensuring health plans comply with the mental health parity laws is a top priority for the Biden administration.

- Part of this effort will be educating the public about the requirements health plans must meet under the mental health parity.

V. Biden Administration's Budget

- The President's Budget Request is used as a blueprint to inform Congress of the priorities of the Administration. The budget is never taken up by Congress in its entirety; however, it sets the stage for negotiations in Congress on where there can be agreement. The items listed below feature increases in funding for key programs that relate to REDC member work.
- **National Institutes of Health**
 - **National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH):** Increase of \$108M
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
 - Provides \$2.9B for SAMHSA's mental health activities to develop the behavioral health infrastructure, expand suicide prevention activities, address children's mental health, and increase community-based mental health programs.
 - This includes a \$825M increase for the Community Mental Health Block Grant
 - This includes \$180M for SAMHSA's suicide prevention programs, an increase in \$78M.
 - In July of 2022, the National Suicide Lifeline will transition to 9-8-8 and the budget request \$102M, a \$78M increase to prepare for this transition.
- **Department of Labor**
 - **Employee Benefit and Security Administration:** Increase of 26% totaling over \$218M.
 - Some of these monies would go to increasing staffing levels and estimates addressing 520 MHPAEA inquiries and work on regulatory projects involving health plan standards and other items.
- **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services**
 - Make permanent the American Rescue Plan expansion of premium tax credits costing close to \$61M from 2022-2026 and totaling \$163B from 2022-2031.
- **Department of Agriculture**
 - Rural e-Connectivity/ReConnect: Increase of \$65M to total \$700M to support broadband loans, grants, and loan combinations that will provide high speed broadband communities with populations up to 20,000.

VI. Other News

- **Bipartisan Bill Seeks to Expand Funding to Cities Dealing with Mental Health Crises**

- The bill led by Sens. Cortez-Masto (D-NV) and Cornyn (R-TX) would provide funding to expand mental health services and create a nationwide set of standards for running crisis hotlines, urgent care facilities, residential centers and mobile units that respond to behavioral crises.
- Funding under the federal bill would come through a block grant program for qualifying state, local and community programs that meet the national standards set out in the legislation.

- **Bipartisan Policy Center Poll on Barriers to MH/SUD Treatment**

- A [new national poll](#) conducted by BPC and Morning Consult found:
 - 58% of Americans say the cost of a provider and whether the provider is in their insurance network are their top priorities when seeking treatment.
 - 51% consider affordability and 41% consider availability of providers taking new patients are the two largest barriers to getting the help they need.
 - 23% of people across ethnicities have used telehealth and in-person MH/SUD services during COVID-19, with adults ages 18-44 receiving the most treatment.
 - Close to 40% of adults say they prefer receiving treatment through a mix of video calls, phone calls and in-person visits.