

11/12/2021

Hello REDC Members,

Here is your weekly policy update!

Telehealth

REDC Submits Senate Finance Committee RFI

- Earlier this week, the REDC submitted its comment in response to the Senate Finance Committee's Request for Information (RFI) on policy solutions and existing legislation to increase access and care for behavioral health services.
- The full comment letter is attached and contains numerous policy recommendations around workforce, ensuring parity and telehealth.
 - Thank you to the REDC members that participated in the insurance survey and for the REDC Board on their guidance in helping craft these recommendations.

PSYPACT Expansion

- The American Psychological Association has increased participation in their Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT).
- PSYPACT is an agreement allowing psychologists in participating jurisdictions to practice across state lines, whether via telepsychology or temporary in-person practice.
 - Jurisdictions participating thus far include Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio, Tennessee, D.C. and West Virginia.
- If you reside in a jurisdiction that has joined PSYPACT, learn how you can submit an application to practice via telepsychology or temporary face-to-face practice [here](#).

Ideologically Opposing Think Tanks Team Up for Telehealth

- The left-leaning Progressive Policy Institute is partnering with the conservative Americans for Prosperity to call for an expansion of telehealth services.
- The two entities released a [report](#) that studied the impact of the pandemic-era rise of telehealth has had on health spending and utilization finding:
 - Telehealth patients spent less and used fewer health services over time.
 - Patients monthly rate of ER visits fell significantly—a shift the groups chalk up to the providers' ability to intervene earlier.
 - The two groups are advocating for legislation that would further expand telehealth availability, including the CONNECT Act from Sen.

Schatz (D-HI) which would permanently extend COVID-era telehealth flexibilities (the REDC has endorsed this legislation).

Biden Administration's Infrastructure Package Includes Broadband Investments

- The passage of the infrastructure package last week includes \$40 billion for states to build out broadband infrastructure and \$14 billion to help consumers afford their internet bills.

Health Insurance

Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Boosts Outpatient Service Payments

- Hospital-owned outpatient and ambulatory surgery center payment rates will each increase by 2%, this includes mental health services for our REDC members sites that are connected to a hospital.

UnitedHealthCare Expands ACA footprint into 7 new states in 2022

- UHC will now be available on the ACA marketplace in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, and Texas.
- UHC will also make a virtual-first plan available on the exchanges, which includes 24/7 primary care, urgent or specialty care for \$0 and access to in-person care in the insurer's network as needed.

California Governor Newsom Signs SB 221

- The law requires that mental health and substance abuse patients be offered return appointments no more than 10 days after a previous session, unless their provider Ok's less frequent visits.
- Current insurance regulations already require giving patients an initial mental health visit no more than 10 days after they request it. However, there is nothing on the books specifically about follow up care.
- The law will take effect in July and is sponsored by the National Union of Healthcare Workers who have been particularly critical of Kaiser Permanente, the state's largest commercial insurer for its well-publicized mental health care deficiencies.

[Kaiser Family Foundation Releases Survey on Workplace Coverage](#)

- The pandemic altered employers benefit programs, relying more on telehealth and offering an increasing array of mental health services.
 - Nearly 1/3 of employers with at least 50 employees expanded how enrollees could receive mental health treatment or substance abuse

- services and 16% developed new resources such as an employee assistance program.
 - In 2021, 95% of firms with at least 50 employees offered some health care services through telemedicine, compared to 85% last year and 67% 3 years ago.
 - Nearly half of employers with at least 50 employees agree telemedicine would be important going forward, compared to 4% who said it would not be important in the future.
- The cost of an employer-sponsored health insurance plan for a family rose by roughly 4% from last year.
 - The average worker with a family plan in 2021 paid nearly \$6,000 in premiums or 28% of the total cost.
 - The survey also showed a growing number of workers are paying higher deductibles before their coverage takes effect. Since 2016, the percentage of workers with at least a \$2,000 deductible increased from 23% to 29%.
- Compared to 20 years ago, costs have tripled. In 2001, a family plan cost about \$7,100 and employees paid roughly \$1,800. Today, employers spend more than \$16,000 for a family plan, while workers pitch in nearly \$6,000.
 - The average premium for family based coverage has increased 22% over the last 5 years and 47% over the last 10 years.
 - The average deductible for employees with single coverage rose by \$70.

NDAAs Status:

- Members on both sides of the aisle and both sides of the Capitol are getting antsy for a Senate NDAA vote, and Chairman Reed is pressuring for it to happen before Thanksgiving. However, with Build Back Better also on the docket, it's unclear whether NDAA may be pushed to December.
 - Meanwhile it appears House and Senate leaders from both parties are getting together to "pre-conference" or begin negotiations ahead of the Senate vote.
- Shaheen and Tillis are good to go with the SERVE Act amendment.
- Klobuchar, Shaheen, and Rounds are ready and excited to introduce the military health professionals' eating disorders training amendment – and are strategizing how best to position the amendment for passage.
- Next Steps:
 - **Senate Floor Amendment & Passage:** Senators Shaheen & Tillis submit the SERVE amendment language and Senators Klobuchar, Shaheen, & Rounds submit military health ED training language ahead of the Senate Floor vote. We will advocate hard and activate grassroots/tops to get both amendments passed!

- **Conference Negotiations:** Then both the House & Senate NDAA will need to be conferenced for differences, and have one more vote in both Chambers

Have a great weekend!
Center Road Solutions Team