12/10/2021

Hello REDC Members,

It was great to see many of you at the REDC All Member meeting in Henderson today! We wanted to share our regular policy update that includes some of the important information that was shared during the all member meeting.

 Telehealth

- **Letters to Commercial Payors (see attached zip file)**
    - Earlier this week, the REDC Consortium led an effort in urging for continuation of tele-mental services at all levels of care to 22 commercial payors.
        - The letters were addressed to the CEO and CMO of each entity.
        - **We encourage members to send a copy of the letters to the contacts you work with at these companies as appropriate.**
    - The REDC was joined by 27 other MH/SUD organizations.
    - The letters were also sent to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, U.S. Department of Labor, Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce.
- **Public Health Emergency Declaration**
    - We are being to hear that the PHE will remain in effect at minimum through March 2022 (currently, the expiration is set for January 15, 2022), but stakeholders are pushing for a July 2022 extension.
    - The PHE declaration affords states flexibilities in state funding, including flexibilities around state licensure.
- **Medicare Telehealth Data Drops**
    - CMS released data on telehealth utilization which will inform future telehealth policy.
    - Medicare telehealth visits surged to levels 63x higher in 2020 than 2019, with appointments for behavioral health seeing the biggest growth.
        - 38% of visits accounted for behavioral health in 2020 vs. 1% in 2019.
            - As high as 70% of these visits were potentially reimbursable as "audio-only."
        - Virtual care made up 8.3% of 2020 primary care visits.
    - 53M Medicare virtual visits in 2020 took place vs. 840,000 in 2019 and the gains came across all ethnic and racial groups.

- o The key takeaway is that wide expansion of telehealth in 2020 did not lead to runaway health care utilization," said a researcher at University of Michigan.
  - o The data can be found on CMS' website here.

- **ACA Market**
  - o About 4.6M people signed up for ACA plans through the 5th week of open enrollment, with roughly 923,000 people newly enrolled.
  - o Enrollment is up 20% in Texas and 9% in Florida compared to this time last year.
    - ▪ These two states have the highest uninsured rates in the country.
    - ▪ Texas leads with 17.5% of its population uninsured. Florida ranks 5th at 12.3% uninsured.
  - o Overall, states that have not expanded Medicaid saw a 9% uptick in enrollment.
  - o The federal government has quadrupled the number of ACA navigators to assist people signing up for coverage and allied with small businesses to get the word out.
    - ▪ Additionally, this is the first time open enrollment was advertised in languages other than English and Spanish. Languages added include: Tagalog, Hindi, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Korean.

- U.S. Surgeon General Releases Comprehensive on Youth Mental Health
  - o Key takeaways mentioned in the report:
    - ▪ **Eating disorders were mentioned with a list of other mental health illnesses that can impact one's daily functioning.**
    - ▪ **Eating disorders were also mentioned when discussing digital technology. "Exposure to digital technology can lead to obesity, eating disorders, trade off with sleep, encourage children to negatively compare themselves to others, and lead to depression, anxiety, and self-harm."**
- The report provides recommendations to support youth mental health for various groups of individuals.

Recommendations for Social Media, Video Gaming, and Other Technology Companies

- Prioritize user health and wellbeing at all stages of product development.
  - o Elevate user safety, health, and wellbeing in the culture and leadership of technology companies.
  - o Assess and address risks to users at the front end of product development.

- Continually measure the impact of products on user health and wellbeing and share data with public.
- Recognize that the impact of platforms and products can vary from user to user, and proactively ensure that products designed for adults are also safe for children and adolescents.
- Be transparent and allow for independent researchers and the public to study the impact of company products on user health and wellbeing.
  - Allow users to provide informative data about their online experience to independent researchers.
  - Directly provide researchers with data and enable understanding of (a) subgroups of users most at risk of harm and (b) algorithmic design and operation.
  - Partner with researchers and experts to analyze the mental health impacts of new products and features in advance of rollout. Regularly publish findings.
  - Allow a broad range of researchers to access data and previous research instead of providing access to a privileged few.
- Build user-friendly tools that help children and adolescents engage online in healthy ways.
  - Take a holistic approach to designing online spaces hospitable to young people.
  - Limit children's exposure to harmful online content.
  - Give users opportunities to control their online activity, including by opting out of content they may find harmful.
  - Develop products that actively safeguard and promote mental health and wellbeing.
- Promote equitable access to technology that supports the wellbeing of children and youth.

Recommendations for organizations:

- Educate the public about the importance of mental health, reduce negative stereotypes, bias, and stigma around mental illness.
- Implement evidence-based programs that promote health development, support children, youth, and their families and increase resilience.
- Address the unique mental health needs of at-risk youth, such as racial and the ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with disabilities.
- Elevate the voices of children, young people, and families.

Recommendations for federal, state, local, and tribal governments:

- Address the economic and social barriers that contribute to poor mental health for young people, families, and caregivers.
- Take action to ensure safe experiences online for children and young people.
- Ensure all children and youth have comprehensive and affordable coverage for mental health.

- Support integration of screening and treatment into primary care.
  - Expand Pediatric Mental Health Care Access programs.
- Provide resources and technical assistance to strengthen school-based mental health programs.
- Invest in prevention programs, such as evidence-based social and emotional learning.
- Expand the use of telehealth for mental health challenges.

NDAA Status:

- In the last week, Congress gave up on the Senate's NDAA, instead opting to craft a compromise NDAA behind the scenes. They published this "NDAA 2.0" text and voted it through the House successfully earlier this week.
- The NDAA 2.0 successfully included the SERVE Act! Unfortunately it did not include the "Meng Amendment" which furnished military provider trainings in eating disorders.
- Nevertheless it is a huge win for SERVE to have made it in this compromise behind-the-scenes version and be passed through the House.
- Next Steps:
  - **Senate Floor Passage:** The Senate will take up the House's NDAA 2.0 next week and hopefully pass and send it to Biden's desk.

Have a great weekend,
Center Road Solutions Team