

02/04/2022

Hello REDC Members,

Here is this week's policy update.

Telehealth

- 35 Senators and nine House members led by Sens. Schatz (D-HI) and Wicker (R-MS) wrote a letter to Congressional leadership last Friday urging them to extend pandemic telehealth flexibilities in the spending package to patch funding set to expire on February 18.
 - A longer-term extension of telehealth flexibilities would allow orgs to invest more in virtual care and prevent an abrupt curtailing of telehealth access, the bipartisan group of lawmakers wrote.
- **Telehealth Pathway to Reform Letter (letter attached)**
 - The REDC was one of 336 organizations to join in a letter of support urging Congress and their leadership in facilitating a pathway to comprehensive permanent telehealth reform that would provide certainty to patients and the nation's healthcare providers while providing sufficient time for Congress and the administration to analyze the impact of telehealth on patient care.
 - The letter calls for Congress to advance permanent telehealth reform focused on the following specific priorities:
 - Authorize the continuation of all current telehealth waivers through December 31, 2024;
 - Require HHS to complete all feasible evaluations related to telehealth by fall 2023 and combine findings into a single overarching dashboard with recommendations to inform permanent telehealth legislation by Congress; and
 - Pass permanent, evidence-based telehealth legislation for implementation in 2024.
- **HHS Report Releases Report on Telehealth-Use Disparities**
- Nearly 1 in 4 people surveyed between April and October 2021 used telehealth in the prior 4 weeks.
 - Black respondents were the most likely to report telehealth use among racial groups at nearly 27%, followed by multiracial respondents at 26.2%, Latino respondents at 24.4%, Asian respondents at 22.2% and white respondents at 21.1%.
- Other key findings include:
 - People earning less than \$25,000 used video telehealth for 48.7% of visits, steadily declining among income groups to 68.8% among people earning \$100,000 or more.

- White respondents had the highest rate of video telehealth visits at 61.9%, followed by multiracial or other respondents at 58.9%, Black respondents at 53.6%, Asian respondents at 51.3% and Latino respondents at 50.7%.
- Younger people were much more likely to use video-enabled telehealth, with 72.5% of visits for people ages 18 to 24 on video versus 43.5% for people 65 and older.

Parity

• Senate HELP Committee Hearing

- Earlier this week, the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing entitled, “Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders: Responding to the Growing Crisis”.
- Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) commented on parity violations in nutrition therapy between diabetes and eating disorders.
- The clip can be viewed [here](#) and the recording of the hearing can be viewed [here](#).
- Senator Murray (D-WA) expressed alarm over the sharp uptick in mental illness since the start of the pandemic, including among children, and called on Democrats and Republicans to work together to craft a spending package that addresses the problem.
 - The Senator stated that all Americans should be concerned about the recent [spike in kids’ visits to the emergency room for mental health crises](#), thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts.
 - Part of the problem, she explained, is that the nation’s mental health and substance use disorder workforce is stretched too thin to meet children’s growing needs. And if we keep stretching without taking action, she warned.
- Senator Murkowski (R-AK) shared Senator Murray’s desire to work across party lines to boost funding for mental health services, noting that this is one of the few areas Democrats and Republicans have worked together in the past.
 - The Senator previewed a bill she plans to unveil that would protect Coast Guard members who seek mental health treatment from being discharged.

• The American Medical Association send a letter to the Senate HELP Committee

- The letter is to Committee leadership urging them to address nearly 15 years of repeated failures by health insurance companies to comply with the parity law.
- The full letter can be read [here](#).

Sound the Alarm Campaign

- The REDC Consortium is a member of the Sound the Alarm Campaign. A campaign that calls for a national state of emergency for mental health. (<https://www.soundthealarmforkids.org/>)
- They had their first Sound the Alarm for Kids partners meeting this week.
 - Here are the [slides](#) from the presentation and a [recording](#) of the webinar.
 - They asked for feedback on the draft [policy principles](#) by [emailing them](#) directly by **Thursday, Feb. 10**. These are intended to be high-level principles which represent broad consensus ideas to promote and support child and adolescent mental health.
 - They created [a quick survey](#) to learn more about partners upcoming events, blog preferences and ideas, resources and more.
 - Upcoming Events:
 - Feb. 8, 2022 @ 10 am EST: **Protecting Youth Mental Health part 1 - advisory call to action**
 - Presenting to Senate Committee on Finance and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy
 - Feb. 2022 (Time & Date TBA): Protecting Youth Mental Health part 2
 - Presenting to Senate Committee on Finance
 - Feb. 2022 (Time & Date TBA - likely end of Feb.)
 - Congressional Black Caucus virtual town hall to discuss mental health issues affecting Black families

SERVE Act

- We are still crafting a letter from REDC to the Department of Defense to encourage speedy implementation that is aligned with our and Congress' intent.

Have a great weekend!

Center Road Solutions Team