

04/15/2022

Hello REDC Members,

Here is this week's policy update.

NEW DATE! REDC Virtual Advocacy Day

- Date: **Wednesday, June 22 from 9am to 4pm EDT**
- Where: Virtual, through Zoom
- Register [here](#).
 - **Registration closes Monday May 30.**
- This advocacy day, you will meet with Congressional staff to discuss:
 - Maintaining telehealth flexibilities that have been expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Ensuring telehealth as a service modality for MH/SUD is at parity with telehealth offerings for medical/surgical services.

Public Health Emergency Extended

- HHS Secretary Becerra has extended the COVID-19 PHE another 90 days with the next expiration slated for July 15.
 - The renewal means expanded telehealth services, state support and Medicaid coverage protections will continue.
 - The Administration has pledged to give states two months' notice if they plan to NOT renew the PHE. That would mean a potential announcement around May.

Telehealth

The HHS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) launches new webpage on telehealth

- The [webpage](#) will be updated with oversight work assessing telehealth services, including the impact of the PHE telehealth flexibilities.
- These reviews will provide objective findings and recommendations that can further inform policymakers and other stakeholders considering changes to telehealth policies.

Senators Portman (R-OH) and Whitehouse (D-RI) Urge DEA and HHS to Extend Americans' Access to Telehealth

- The letter urges the agencies to use their authority under the Ryan Haight Act to ensure Americans can continue access to important medication, such as Medication-Assisted Therapies (MAT) for SUD and other necessary drugs, via telehealth once the PHE ends.
- Under the Ryan Haight Act, an in-person examination is required in order to prescribe controlled substances such as buprenorphine.

- In March 2020, that requirement was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing providers to prescribe MAT and other necessary drugs via telehealth .
- The REDC signed onto a letter earlier this year to the DEA urging for the same.

Telehealth Utilization Increased Nationally for Third Straight Month

- According to [FAIR Health's Monthly Regional Tracker](#), telehealth utilization increased in every US census region, with the greatest increase (17.5%) in the West.
- In January 2022, social work was the leading telehealth specialty nationally and, in every region, but the West, where primary care was the leading telehealth specialty.

Health Affairs Study Shows Pandemic Drives Use of Telehealth for Mental Health Care

- The pandemic is likely to permanently increased the delivery of mental health counseling through telehealth.
 - While in-person mental health visits dropped by nearly 22% in the early months of the pandemic, visits bounced back by December, with an almost 48% of patients electing to use a telehealth service.
 - The study suggests that telehealth services for mental health counseling expanded significantly and is likely to stay.
 - Future applications of tele-mental health should really be focused on understanding the population, context and disease conditions most conducive to this method.

Letters of Support

- The REDC signed onto a letter led by Mental Health America, the American Psychological Association and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors in support of setting aside 10% in the Mental Health Block Grant program for prevention activities.
 - The final letter is attached.
- The REDC signed onto a letter in support of the Virtual Peer Support Act.
 - The proposal would create a grant program that provides a one-time grant to enable eligible local, tribal, and national peer-led organizations who currently offer behavioral health peer support services to expand online behavioral health support services and increase the reach of peer support programs.
 - The final letter is attached.

SERVE Act

- Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) Call for Expansion of Eating Disorder Treatment Under TRICARE.
 - Senators Shaheen and Tillis sent a letter to the Department of Defense urging them to implement provisions secured in the FY22 NDAA that authorizes expanding eating disorders treatment coverage to TRICARE beneficiaries.

- The NDAA did not expand eating disorders coverage to military retirees and their families. The senators' letter argues that defense health officials have the authority to extend that coverage themselves.
- The full article can be read [here](#).

News Article

- The Air Force Weights Waist-Height Measurement to Replace Tape Test.
 - The Air Force dropped the tape test from its fitness assessment in 2020.
 - While a replacement for the body measurement has not officially been announced, a leaked document circulating online shows that a more lenient and simple standard may take its place.
 - Images posted to the unofficial Air Force amn/nco/snco Facebook page showed charts and emails laying out how a new test called the "waist-to-height ratio" could be put in place as soon as this summer.
 - The full article can be read [here](#).

Have a great weekend!

Center Road Solutions Team