

09/02/2022

Hi REDC Members,

Below is your policy update for the week.

Save the Date!

- Telehealth Awareness Week (Sept. 18-24) is quickly approaching and the REDC is a partner org for the event. We welcome REDC members to take part in the #TelehealthIsHealth campaign on social media.
- Attached is the **custom REDC social media graphic** REDC members can use to highlight your role as an endorsing partner. The full social media toolkit for use can be [found here](#).

Parity

- **U.S. Department of Labor Roundtable Discussion**
 - The REDC will be represented at a U.S. DOL Roundtable featuring Secretary Walsh to discuss parity enforcement efforts on Thursday, September 8.
 - Topics for discussion include:
 - What is the highest priority for your organization as you look toward the coming year?
 - What key challenges and opportunities should we be aware of in terms of access to treatment, health insurance coverage, workforce training and development, and other related topics?
 - How can the Department of Labor further strengthen our efforts to improve outcomes for mental health, recovery, and suicide prevention?
 - Center Road Solutions team will be working with the REDC Board to help inform the discussion topics above in preparation for the roundtable.
- **Senate Companion: Parity Enforcement Act (H.R. 1364)**
 - The Senate companion bill of the Parity Enforcement Act may be formally introduced next week.
 - This is the bill that would give the Department of Labor the authority to impose civil monetary penalties on health plans and insurers for violating the parity law.
 - The language in the Senate companion is likely to match the language that was included in Build Back Better, which is good news because that version explicitly included third party administrators as entities that could be subject to the civil

monetary penalties (they usually control all of the health benefit decisions for self-funded group health plans).

- The House bill was included in Democrat's Build Back Better reconciliation package, but unfortunately was not retained in the passed Inflation Reduction Act.

Telehealth

• **Telehealth Flexibilities May Contributed to Lower Overdose Rates Among Medicare Beneficiaries**

- A study published in JAMA Psychiatry looked at the treatment of more than 175,000 Medicare beneficiaries through February 2021 and found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 20% of patients received care via telehealth, up from just 0.6% pre-pandemic.
 - More also received medication including buprenorphine for opioid use disorder.
- Medicare patients who got treatment during the pandemic via telehealth were less likely to overdose and more likely to continue receiving care, the study found.
 - The study authors do not claim that telehealth led directly to the improved outcomes.
 - Studies have shown that prescribing buprenorphine virtually is at least as effective — if not more effective — in keeping patients engaged in treatment. Patients have found virtual care quicker and more private than getting treatment in-person. That's important given the stigma often associated with the condition.
- The Drug Enforcement Administration — which is concerned about buprenorphine abuse — says it is working on a special registration process to allow more providers to prescribe via telehealth. The Biden administration said it aims to publish a proposed rule in August — which has come and gone. It's still being reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget.

• **Telehealth Stakeholders Push for HDHP Extension**

- Telehealth stakeholders are urging the Senate to pass a two-year extension of pre-deductible coverage for telehealth services under high-deductible health plans.
 - They estimate the extension could cost \$90 million per year based on former Congressional Budget Office scores.
- The House-passed two year extension of pandemic telehealth flexibilities, now pending in the Senate, currently does not extend a provision that lets health plans offer coverage of telehealth services pre-deductible to people enrolled in high-deductible health plans linked to health savings accounts. That provision is set to expire at the end of the year.

- **CMS Publishes Roadmap and Series of Fact Sheets for Providers to Navigate Regulatory Changes**

- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published a [roadmap](#), blog and series of [fact sheets](#) to help health care providers to navigate the regulatory changes that will come at the conclusion of the PHE.
 - The roadmap outlines waivers that will terminate at the end of the PHE, including those related to telehealth.

Insurance

- **America's Health Insurance Plans Outline Mental Health Policy Goals**

- America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) have released [policy proposals](#) that break down what they're planning to put advocacy muscle behind in the mental health and substance use care space.
- It's multipronged state and federal approach includes changes to telehealth policy and expansion of broadband technology to fuel the service, efforts to integrate mental health and substance abuse treatment into primary care and additional funding for a range of efforts and resources

Letters of Support (all attached)

- The REDC was a signatory on a letter to HHS Secretary Becerra and SAMHSA Assistant Secretary Delphin-Rittmon to expediate youth crisis guidance to assist in informing and improving care with the launch of 988.
 - The letter was led by Mental Health America
- The REDC was a signatory on a letter to HHS Secretary Becerra urging for the intentional integration of mental health and substance use within the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR).
 - The Biden administration has elevated ASPR to be a separate division within HHS.
 - The letter was led by The Kennedy Forum
- The REDC was a signatory on a letter supporting the Improving Access to Behavioral Health Integration Act (S. 4306).
 - The legislation led by Sens. Smith (D-MN) and Moran (R-KS) would provide direct support to both pediatric and adult primary care practices to help them overcome initial hurdles, prioritizing small practices and those operating in health professional shortage areas, and in Tribal or other medically underserved communities where the need is the greatest.

Wishing each of you a relaxing holiday weekend!
Allison