

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Tina Smith  
U.S. Senate  
720 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
U.S. Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Smith and Murkowski:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care, is writing to express our strong support for the Tele-Mental Health Improvement Act, which would require group health plans and health insurers to cover mental health and substance use disorder telehealth services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Your leadership on this issue is critical for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

People living with behavioral health conditions need timely and safe access to mental health and substance use disorder services during this crisis. The pandemic is exacerbating existing behavioral health issues and leading to new instances of individuals suffering from anxiety, depression, and substance misuse. Receiving in-person behavioral health care at this time exposes people to greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and the associated fear could also imperil any therapeutic gains from in-person treatment. Allowing individuals to receive behavioral health treatment through telehealth will address the heightened risk of mental illness and substance use disorders while concurrently mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

Your legislation temporarily requires group health plans and insurers to cover mental health and substance use disorder services through telehealth if those benefits would be otherwise covered in-person. We applaud you for requiring that health plans and insurers reimburse these telehealth benefits at the same rate as in-person delivery of care. We commend you for specifying that there should be no barriers to care such as additional prior authorization requirements, that the patient have a pre-existing relationship with the provider, or that a provider needs to be present with the person receiving treatment.

All of these provisions are essential, as many providers have found that during the crisis mental health and substance use disorder services are not covered through telehealth, or the reimbursement is lower than it is for in-person care, and there are often other hurdles in place that restrict access. This legislation will grant individuals experiencing mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders access to safe and timely care and will help mitigate some of the pandemic-related increases in deaths of despair due to suicides and overdoses.

The MHLG thanks you for your bipartisan commitment to improving access to telehealth for Americans who need mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment. We pledge our support to help you move this legislation through Congress.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Suicidology  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Society of Addiction Medicine  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Centerstone  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists  
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Education Development Center  
EMDR International Association  
Girls, Inc.  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium  
International OCD Foundation  
International Society for Psychiatric Nurses  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Kennedy Forum

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mental Health America  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health National  
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Federation of Families  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies\*  
Postpartum Support International  
Psychotherapy Action Network  
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium  
RI International  
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America  
School Social Work Association of America  
SMART Recovery  
The Jed Foundation  
The Trevor Project  
Trinity Health  
Well Being Trust  
Wounded Warrior Project