

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Kim Schrier, MD
Longworth House Office Building
Room 1123
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe, MD
Cannon House Office Building
Room 102
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Schrier and Roe,

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 H.R. 6644, the Health Care at Home Act, which would require group health plans and health insurers to cover telehealth services, including mental health and substance use disorder services, during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Your bipartisan leadership on this issue is critical for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

During this unprecedented pandemic, timely and safe access to health care is of paramount importance and essential to limiting the spread of COVID-19. However, due to the highly virulent and infectious nature of the disease, in-person service delivery is often not possible and further threatens public health. Americans need expanded access to telehealth services to ensure that they can see a healthcare professional when they need care and that they do not increase the risk of spreading COVID-19. This is especially true for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders, as the nation was already in the grips of concurrent opioid and suicide epidemics and the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened existing behavioral health concerns.

Your legislation temporarily requires group health plans and insurers to cover telehealth service delivery for benefits that are otherwise covered in-person, when those services can be safely and effectively provided through telehealth. We applaud you for explicitly specifying in the legislation that this includes mental health and substance use disorder services. We also commend you for requiring that health plans and insurers reimburse these telehealth benefits at the same rate as in-person delivery of care. Both of these provisions are critical as many beneficiaries and providers have found during the initial stages of the emergency that mental health and substance use disorder benefits were either not being covered through telehealth at all, or that reimbursement was far lower than it was for in-person service delivery. This legislation will provide those with mental health conditions and substance use disorders access to the care they need during this public health emergency and reduce the chances that our country will see a spike in suicides and overdoses.

The MHLG thanks you again for your bipartisan commitment to making access to telehealth possible for all Americans, including those who need mental health and 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 Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association on Health and Disability
American Association of Suicidology
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
International OCD Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
Legal Action Center
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NACBHDD, National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability
Directors
NARMH, National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
No Health Without Mental Health
Psychotherapy Action Network
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
SMART Recovery
The Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
The Kennedy Forum