

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
S-222, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20511

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
S-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

We are leading national organizations representing people with mental health conditions and addiction, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders. We want to thank you for your urgent action to provide economic relief in this time of crisis.

We are writing to highlight three specific issues of critical importance to people with mental health conditions and addictions, their families and providers of behavioral health services. We note that 1 in 5 Americans has a mental health condition and everyone across the country is experiencing increased mental health concerns such as increased anxiety from isolation created by the current public health crisis created by COVID-19. We also know that those who are severely impacted by the virus either as patients or healthcare professionals may need follow up mental health care to address trauma from this experience. Given the need to provide mental health care and support during this crisis, we request the following changes:

First, remove the language excluding nonprofits that receive Medicaid reimbursements from the emergency Small Business Loan Program. Many non-profit organizations receive Medicaid funds, but are experiencing significant losses due to difficulties in billing, cancelled appointments, and increased demands requiring infrastructure-related costs. Additional funds through the Small Business Loan Program will be critical to supporting mental health providers as they continue employing staff and providing critical services to the public.

Second, we are very appreciative of the additional flexibilities in telehealth in Medicare and we request that you **expand these flexibilities to allow reimbursement for audio only telephone services.** Millions of Medicare patients who are quarantined and/or physically distancing do not have cellphones with video chat capability, and/or do not know how to use this capability. They may also not have internet service, broadband speed or sufficient data. This is especially true for those residing in rural areas or who are lower income. At a time when older adults, particularly those with chronic conditions are vulnerable to COVID-19 and isolated in their

homes, they need to be able to pick up a phone and connect easily with mental health providers. Many people are not comfortable using video for services because of their mental health condition or lack of familiarity with the technology and they need urgent mental health care.

Third, we strongly urge you to specifically **add funds for mental health and addiction care**. The current bill has much needed resources for health centers, but it lacks emphasis on behavioral services during a time of multiple crises. We would request similar attention to allocating funds to organizations providing behavioral health care, support and crisis care. This could include resources for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, community-based nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations providing mental health and addiction support services as well increased funding for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Thank you again for your efforts.

Sincerely,

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
The Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Council for Behavioral Health