

# APA ADVOCACY

## *Washington Update*

*APA Advocacy Washington Update is a weekly newsletter that highlights how APA is working to advance the discipline and practice of psychology on Capitol Hill and beyond.*

## **A New Advocacy Network to Mobilize Psychologists**



In a rapidly changing policy environment, psychologists need to make their voices heard on a range of key [advocacy priorities](#) that impact psychology and society. APA's new [Psychology Advocacy Network](#) will enhance our ability to engage psychologists in our advocacy efforts and to provide more timely communications about the issues you care about. Today, our weekly [APA Advocacy Washington Update](#) is being delivered to more than 45,000 psychologists as part of our new grassroots communications. Make your voice heard on [issues](#) that matter most to you.

**To get the latest action alerts, sign up [here](#).**

**To get weekly updates from APA Advocacy, sign up [here](#).**

*For more information, contact Bryant Robinson at [brobinson@apa.org](mailto:brobinson@apa.org).*

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### **Urging CMS Not to Impose Major Medicare Cuts in 2021**

APA and a dozen other provider organizations [wrote jointly](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on Feb. 10 to urge the agency to develop alternatives to substantial new cuts in Medicare reimbursement rates for certain professions, including psychology. CMS plans to make the cuts next year to pay for new, higher payments for evaluation and management services. Services provided to evaluate and manage patients are billed to Medicare using specific evaluation and management (E/M) billing codes. Only

physicians and a handful of non-physician providers (such as physician assistants) can bill Medicare for these services, which comprise 40% of Medicare payments to individual providers. CMS is implementing a new E/M coding system designed to reduce administrative burdens on physicians and improve payment accuracy, and to better reflect current medical practices. CMS projects that the new system will result in significant payment increases for E/M services beginning in 2021.

Unfortunately, because Medicare provider payment adjustments must be budget neutral, CMS plans to pay for the E/M codes adjustment by reducing reimbursement rates for other provider services, including psychologists. CMS is projecting a 7% cut in Medicare reimbursement rates on Jan. 1, 2021. APA is deeply concerned about the impact that such cuts would have on psychologists' ability to see Medicare patients, and has held initial meetings with CMS staff to discuss this issue. We are working both internally and with other provider organizations to develop legislative and regulatory strategies to minimize, if not prevent, these cuts and will be talking to members of Congress about this issue during the upcoming Practice Leadership Conference.

*For more information, contact Doug Walter, JD, at [dwalter@apa.org](mailto:dwalter@apa.org).*

### **Calling for an Immediate Halt to Sharing Immigrant Youths' Confidential Psychotherapy Notes with ICE**

APA expressed shock and outrage in [response](#) to reports in the [Washington Post](#) that the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) has been sharing confidential psychotherapy notes with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to deny asylum to some immigrant youths.

"ORR's sharing of confidential therapy notes of traumatized children destroys the bond of trust between patient and therapist that is vital to helping the patient," said APA President Sandra L. Shullman, PhD. "We call on ORR to stop this practice immediately and on the Department of Health and Human Services and Congress to investigate its prevalence. We also call on ICE to release any immigrants who have had their asylum requests denied as a result."

*For more information, contact Kaitlin Luna at [kluna@apa.org](mailto:kluna@apa.org).*

### **Putting the President's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget in Perspective**

The Trump administration released a \$4.8 trillion budget request last week, proposing cuts to many science, education and health programs. This is the fourth budget the administration has sent to Congress. All the budgets have included deep domestic spending cuts, social safety net cuts and overly optimistic economic growth projections. The proposals have another trait in common: Congress has almost entirely ignored them in developing final budget and spending legislation. APA will continue to work with the administration where our interests intersect, and with our champions in Congress, on a final budget and other legislation to enhance the social safety net, increase funding for psychological research, and expand access to health and mental health services and the workforce that provides those services. We also aim to increase opportunities for applied psychologists and to advance educational and economic opportunities for all. Find more details on the budget proposal [here](#).

*For more information, contact Pat Kobor at [pkobor@apa.org](mailto:pkobor@apa.org).*

### **Bringing Psychology to New Substance Use Disorder Advisory Committee**

The Department of Health and Human Services has appointed Kathleen Carroll, PhD, Keith Humphreys, PhD, Richard Spoth, PhD, and Luis Torres, PhD, to a new [Interdepartmental Substance Use Disorders Coordinating Committee](#) (ISUDCC). APA nominated a slate of psychologists, including Carrol and Humphreys, to the department last year. The purpose of the committee is to recommend ways to improve the

coordination of activities related to substance use disorders, including research, services, supports and prevention activities across all relevant federal agencies. Further, it will analyze substance use disorder prevention and treatment strategies in different regions and populations in the United States and determine whether federal prevention and treatment efforts align with state and local strategies. Lastly, the group will recommend ways to better engage the public in substance use prevention efforts.

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