

## 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. Learn more about APA's [advocacy priorities](#) for 2020.*

### Advocating for Audio-Only Medicare Telehealth Services During COVID-19 Emergency



APA has partnered with the National Association of Social Workers in calling for a temporary change in Medicare telehealth requirements to include reimbursement for audio-only telephone services. Medicare currently requires that telehealth communication tools have both audio and video capabilities during the COVID-19 emergency period. In a [letter](#) to the Senate and House leadership, APA points to the lack of internet, broadband or smartphone access among some older patients and stresses that patients “need to be able to pick up the phone and connect easily with mental health providers.”

*For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org).*

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### Calling for Priority Behavioral Health Measures in COVID-19 Bill

APA has joined 88 other health and academic organizations in writing a [letter](#) to Vice President Mike Pence and Senate and House leadership urging the administration and Congress to address current and future mental health and substance use needs in actions responding to COVID-19. The letter addresses many APA priorities, notably legislation to include psychologists in the Medicare definition of a physician and to provide greater enforcement of the mental health parity law. The letter also calls for the authorization of mental health workforce loan repayment, an expansion of school-based mental health services and the designation of a three-digit (988) national suicide hotline.

*For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org).*

## **Protecting Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities During COVID-19**

APA has endorsed the [Coronavirus Relief for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act](#), which aims to provide resources and other support to protect the health and well-being of seniors, people with disabilities, and the frontline workers and family caregivers who support them. The bill increases funding for nursing home surveys to promote infection control, which is important for psychologists who work in or visit these facilities. The bill also promotes home and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities and leverages low-income assistance programs for people with Medicare to ensure that those living on low, fixed incomes can afford treatment if they are diagnosed with COVID-19. Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) is the lead sponsor in the Senate and Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) introduced the House companion legislation.

APA also signed on as a supporting organization to a letter by Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar and Attorney General William Barr regarding disability discrimination in COVID-19 care. The letter asks HHS and the Department of Justice to clarify the obligation of states and covered entities to adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as they review and create their “crisis standards of care.” Risks to these groups include denials of care, lower prioritization of care, or denial of or limitation of health-care resources on the basis of one's disability, severity of disability, need for resource-intensive services and supports, or the perception of a lower quality of life on the basis of disability.

*For more information, contact Ben Vonachen at [bvonachen@apa.org](mailto:bvonachen@apa.org).*

## **Advocating for Psychology Students, Campus Safety and Student Mental Health During the COVID-19 Crisis**

APA signed on to a National Women's Law Center letter asking the U.S. Department of Education to pause its Title IX rulemaking for the duration of the COVID-19 national emergency. The letter is consistent with [APA's previous advocacy efforts](#) expressing concerns with the department's proposed rule and its impact on victims of sexual misconduct on college campuses.

APA also signed two letters by the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions asking House and Senate leadership and the White House to include support for students in health fields, including psychology, in any legislation related to COVID-19. The letters call for lawmakers to address the financial aid concerns of students in health professions and they highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clinical training opportunities due to the closure of many sites that administer internships.

APA also included several recommendations in a [House Dear Colleague letter](#) on ways to address the mental health impact of COVID-19. Among them is a request to include a provision allowing college student mental health and medical professionals to practice across state lines for a period of six months. This would help ensure that college students who return home for the remainder of the semester continue to receive care through their campus counseling center. This is particularly critical for students living in areas with lack of access to mental and behavioral health care. As part of the Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA), APA signed onto a [letter](#) highlighting this recommendation.

*For more information, contact Kenneth Polishchuk at [kpolishchuk@apa.org](mailto:kpolishchuk@apa.org).*

## **Calling for a Scientifically Informed Response to COVID-19 Crisis**

APA and its mental health partners wrote a [letter](#) to public health officials leading federal efforts in treating COVID-19 to fully address the cognitive and mental health dimensions of this unfolding public health crisis. Citing research conducted after the SARS epidemic, the groups urged that efforts to educate the public “must take into account background perceptions of risk and anxiety levels of the public at large.” The letter highlighted many ongoing issues, including the need to counter false information about the virus with science-based facts, and to anticipate increased mental health needs during and after the emergency. APA and its partners urged officials to combat discrimination and ensure resources are equally distributed to all groups, including those with existing mental health conditions or developmental disabilities, or any other group with limited access to resources or who may be more likely to experience post-traumatic stress symptoms due to COVID-19.

For more information, contact the advocacy team at [advocacy@apa.org](mailto:advocacy@apa.org).

### **Supporting Tax Credits for Essential Health Providers**

APA's advocacy team worked with Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) to draft a [letter](#) to his fellow members of the House of Representatives calling for an alternative transportation tax credit for health providers who are required to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and would normally take public transportation. The bipartisan letter, co-led by Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.), states that providing such a credit would help mitigate the health risks associated with taking public transportation by providing essential health workers with a fully refundable tax credit for using alternative options such as taxis or a rental car. APA will continue to advocate for inclusion of this provision as the House puts together its version of the COVID-19 package later this week.

For more information, contact Alix Ginsberg, MPH, at [aginsberg@apa.org](mailto:aginsberg@apa.org).

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