

# APA ADVOCACY *Washington Update*

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For more information and resources on COVID-19, visit [APA's webpage](#) for psychologists, health-care workers and the public.

*APA Advocacy Washington Update is a 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.*

## **Integrated Advocacy Success: Psychologists Can Now Provide Phone-Only Services**



On April 30, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced it was expanding Medicare coverage for audio-only phone services during the coronavirus pandemic, including psychotherapy, health behavior assessment and intervention services, and other behavioral health services. Previously, Medicare recipients who wanted to take advantage of psychotherapy through telehealth could do so only via videoconferencing. This expansion is critical for people without access or capability to use those technologies. [Learn about](#) how to bill and what specific services are covered. The change would not have been possible without a well-crafted advocacy effort that enlisted the support of lawmakers in Congress, the administration and at the state level.

Congratulations and thank you for the 10,000-plus messages psychologists sent to Capitol Hill and the administration urging the coverage of audio-only telehealth services in Medicare. Your efforts helped convince the administration to adopt this essential telehealth expansion.

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

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## **Encouraging Support for COVID-19-Related Research**

APA joined the Friends of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) in requesting an increase in COVID-19-related funding for the institute in future phases of coronavirus relief. In a [letter](#) to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), the coalition emphasized that NIDDK supports research into diseases and chronic conditions that are linked to COVID-19 related comorbidities. Finally, the group thanked the congressional leadership for their efforts to address health concerns and economic hardships experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of coronavirus relief.

*For more information, contact Angela L. Sharpe, MG, at [asharpe@apa.org](mailto:asharpe@apa.org).*

## **Advocating for Equity in Internet Access for Students Learning from Home**

APA [joined](#) a group of 53 organizations in support of the Emergency Educational Connections Act (H.R. 6563), introduced by Rep. Grace Meng (D-N.Y.), urging lawmakers to include it as part of a fourth coronavirus relief package. The legislation calls for an additional \$2 billion in funding for the Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate program to expand broadband access for students learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This additional funding would help address disparities in high speed internet access, which are disproportionately impacting learning in already-underserved communities.

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

## **Mitigating COVID-19-Related Learning Loss with State and Local Leaders**

APA has endorsed a [letter](#) to members of the National Governors Association and the Conference of Mayors, asking state and local leaders to address growing concerns about learning loss due to COVID-19. It provides a set of recommendations on how to implement federal funding appropriated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748), as well as other already-existing funds, toward out-of-school time and summer learning programs. The letter also addresses the need for social and emotional supports and the continuity of access to free meals during the summer months.

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

## **Addressing the Heightened Risk of Child Abuse and Neglect During COVID-19**

APA joined more than 500 organizations in asking Congress to prioritize the urgent needs of vulnerable children and families by providing additional support for the child welfare system and critical social services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The [letter](#) describes how school and child care closures, stay-at-home orders, and greater family stress place children and youth at a higher risk of experiencing abuse and neglect. It calls on Congress to provide emergency funding increases for grant programs that provide community-based family strengthening services, or mental health services, to enable these programs to adapt to emergency circumstances and continue to support families and keep children safe.

*For more information, contact Cynthia Whitney at [cmalley@apa.org](mailto:cmalley@apa.org).*

## **Bolstering Federal Support for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

Together with several other national organizations committed to preventing violence against women and supporting survivors, APA signed a [letter](#) urging Congress to address the rise in reports of domestic and sexual violence during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. The letter highlights that home is not a safe place for everyone, particularly for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence. Recommendations include expanding outreach to underserved groups, including immigrants and tribal communities, and

increased funding for survivor programs and services that need those funds to adapt to virtual service provision or otherwise meet physical distancing guidelines, such as in transitional housing.

*For more information, contact Cynthia Whitney at [cmalley@apa.org](mailto:cmalley@apa.org).*

## **Supporting a Range of Publishing Models in Comments to White House Science Office**

APA's publishing activities exist to support and develop the science of psychology, APA argued in April, [responding](#) to a request for [information](#) from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). The OSTP has proposed to require immediate free access to any research article that results from federal support. APA argued in support of the current policy, enacted during the Obama administration, that requires articles written with federal support be made freely available after one year, rather than a one-model-fits-all policy.

APA maintains that the scientific enterprise can best be supported within a diverse ecosystem of publication models, not only that of open access. A mandatory pay-to-publish model (e.g., Gold Open Access) discriminates against researchers from underrepresented groups, including minority and early career researchers whose access to high-quality scientific publishing channels is critical for the future of psychology. Writing for APA, CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, concluded, "The strength of psychological research is grounded in its diversity and breadth. We urge OSTP to protect the freedom to publish without payment and support all models that advance the scientific enterprise."

*For more information, contact David Nygren at [dnygren@apa.org](mailto:dnygren@apa.org) or Katherine McGuire at [kmcguire@apa.org](mailto:kmcguire@apa.org).*

## **Urging Federal Agency Leaders to Prioritize Mental Health and Addiction Providers**

As reported in the [Washington Post](#), APA joined leading mental health and substance use organizations in a [letter](#) to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar calling for the critical need to prioritize mental health and addiction treatment providers in the distribution of the additional \$75 billion in funding for the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund, recently approved by Congress in the Paycheck Protection Program and Care Enhancement Act. APA continues to be steadfast in its advocacy to help ensure mental and behavioral health is a priority as federal lawmakers and agencies leaders respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

## **Informing Lawmakers on COVID-19 Mental and Behavioral Health Needs**

APA joined other invited national and Virginia state leaders in a call with Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) regarding the growing mental and behavioral health issues facing providers and patients. The conversation was an opportunity for constituents, including psychologists Jennifer Morgan, PsyD, an APA Health Care Advisory Committee member, and Bruce Sellars, PsyD, president of the Virginia Psychological Association, to inform the senator of challenges and important COVID-19 needs for consideration in short and long-term relief bills.

The Virginia psychologists raised telehealth concerns of older adults without access to smartphones, internet access and other barriers that highlight the need for Medicare to permit audio-only telehealth coverage of psychotherapy and health behavior assessment and intervention services.

[Sen. Kaine](#) said he was committed to addressing mental and behavioral health in future legislation, and last week he and several other Democratic senators sent a [letter](#) to Senate leadership calling for a range of mental health investments, including workforce, telehealth, child trauma, suicide prevention, and community mental and behavioral health services and supports. APA will continue to engage with his staff on COVID-19 advocacy priorities.

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

## Bringing the Social and Behavioral Science of Pandemics to the U.S. Senate

APA hosted a [virtual briefing](#) for staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation to discuss a range of issues related to the pandemic, including threat perception, social context, science communication, aligning individual and collective interests, governance and leadership, and stress and coping. Leading the discussion were psychologist [Jay Van Bavel](#), PhD, and sociologist [Robb Willer](#), PhD, authors of the *Nature Human Genetics* review article "[Using Social and Behavioral Science to Support COVID-19 Pandemic Response](#)." Through such informal virtual briefings and panel discussions, the Senate is gathering valuable information to inform formal hearings when Congress reconvenes in person.

For more information, contact Geoff Mumford, PhD, at [gmumford@apa.org](mailto:gmumford@apa.org).

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