

AHIP Board of Directors Statement of Commitment: Improving Access to and Quality of Mental Health and Addiction Support

August 2022

Everyone deserves access to effective, affordable, and equitable mental health care and addiction services.

As leaders of health insurance providers who together cover hundreds of millions of Americans, we recognize that mental health is an essential part of overall health, and we reaffirm our longstanding commitment to ensure that patients have access to affordable, high-quality care and services for mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, including addiction care.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated that mental health is everyone's issue— children, adolescents, and adults. Whether coping with stress and anxiety, managing a mental health condition, or confronting an SUD, Americans of all ages will need access to mental health support whether for prevention, treatment, recovery, or ongoing wellness.

Mental health is also an equity issue. Mental health and SUD concerns can be exacerbated in under-represented and underserved communities, which are often forced to contend with social factors such as unstable housing or living conditions, greater uncertainty in the job market, and systemic racism.

Health insurance providers have been working diligently to expand access to mental health and SUD services. While more people are receiving the treatment they need, we recognize that more needs to be done. Health insurance providers are committed to working with care professionals, federal and state policymakers, community organizations, and other health leaders to improve affordability, access, quality, and results for everyone seeking mental health support.

Today, we commit to advocate for policies to expand access to mental health care, improve quality and value, promote parity, advance equity, and educate various stakeholders on how health insurance providers are improving patient access and quality of mental health and SUD care. These advocacy priorities include the following:

- **Help patients navigate in a timely manner to the right setting and practitioner based on their needs for mental health or SUD support.** This may include advocating for and implementing care models that better match patients across the continuum of care practitioners and settings based on their level of acuity. The continuum of care includes crisis intervention, inpatient or residential care, intensive outpatient, office-based, school-based, telehealth, or digital engagement. Health insurance providers can work with health care providers to help patients move across the continuum to achieve their optimal level of wellness.

- **Integrate mental health/SUD support with primary care visits.** Integrating mental health care into physical health care settings can help meet patients where they are and improve access to treatment. For example, primary care physicians, including pediatricians and family physicians, often have the first opportunity to identify and assist a patient who needs mental health care but may not feel equipped to diagnose or treat serious behavioral health conditions. Health insurance providers can be a key partner in providing education, tools, resources, and care coordination to help providers of physical health care offer their patients the support they need where they regularly seek care.
- **Create innovative programs to expand system capacity and increase the number of mental health care practitioners available.** Today, 130 million Americans live in places with [less than one mental health care provider](#) for every 30,000 people. Health care leaders must come together to advocate for effective solutions, and to collaborate to expand our health care system's capacity and increase the number of mental health practitioners to meet and treat the growing need. When government resources are used to encourage people to enter the behavioral health field, we will advocate for requirements that those providers participate in health plan networks, particularly in public programs -- Medicare and Medicaid.
- **Expand access to mental health care through telehealth, virtual visits, and other innovative uses of technologies** that connect people to the mental health support they need. Use of these technologies should consider whether mental health and SUD support can be delivered safely and effectively through them, and what policies are needed to support that delivery. These policies should continue to [protect patient privacy and security](#) consistent with requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- **Continue to ensure that mental health/SUD treatment is covered - on par with physical health treatment in compliance with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA).** Health insurance providers are committed to achieving mental health parity and will continue to collaborate with federal and state policymakers as they conduct the required reviews under the Consolidated Appropriations Act and advocate for process improvements.
- **Advocate for the importance of addressing issues of equity and the impact of the social drivers of health.** Mental health is strongly affected by the environments in which people live, work, play, and grow. We will advocate for policy solutions to improve access to mental health/SUD treatment in all communities in a manner that is equitable and allows all people and families to thrive and achieve their best possible mental health.
- **Improve quality and move toward value.** Health insurance providers are working with mental health practitioners on tools and approaches to develop patient-centered and outcomes-based measures of

quality for mental health services. This includes encouraging practitioners to use standardized tools for routine patient screening and identification of mental health/SUD issues. We are also encouraging value-based care models that align incentives to improve behavioral health quality and outcomes.

- **Promote access to evidence-based SUD/opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment.** Recognizing that SUD/OUD continue to rise, health insurance providers have been working to analyze, better understand, and disseminate information about the health impacts of substance use and related risks, including tobacco use, alcohol abuse, and illicit use of pharmaceutical and other drugs. We will continue to work with patients, their families, and communities to promote effective treatment options for SUD and medications for OUD – including supporting patients in receiving treatment and recovery.

Good mental health is good health. It is important to everyone. Working together with our partners in health care, we can improve access and well-being for every person we serve.

About AHIP

AHIP is the national association whose members provide health care coverage, services, and solutions to hundreds of millions of Americans every day. We are committed to market-based solutions and public-private partnerships that make health care better and coverage more affordable and accessible for everyone. Visit www.ahip.org to learn how working together, we are Guiding Greater Health.