



American Mental Health Counselors Association

(A similar communication was sent to several health insurance associations including the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness)

March 18, 2020

Matt Eyles
President and CEO
America's Health Insurance Plans
601 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 500
South Building
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Eyles:

This is an unprecedented time in our country. Daily life has been altered, and our citizens are struggling with new and existing mental health concerns. As the health care industry responds to ensure quality and continuity of care, the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) would like to offer our support.

As the 140,000+ mental health counselors in the US rally around their clients and strategize ways to ensure continuity of care, it is essential remove barriers. As an association, AMHCA asks that all health insurers and health plans waive any onerous restrictions in regard to licensed, qualified mental health practitioners – such as clinical mental health counselors -- providing tele-behavioral health care services to their patients and clients.

Timely access to behavioral health services during this period of social distancing is critically important for those Americans who diagnosed with existing mental illnesses and who could see their conditions exacerbate due to the coronavirus outbreak crisis in the U.S. Additionally, there are likely many new cases that will emerge as our citizens navigate the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty created by this pandemic.

It is critical that qualified behavioral health professionals continue to provide needed services and we request that health insurers and health plans leverage tele-medicine

and tele-behavioral health care services to facilitate care and coordinate care as appropriate. Virtual care through many mechanisms will help address gaps in care, and access to care especially in underserved areas, particularly in rural areas.

In these challenging times, we need to utilize all available resources to appropriately advocate and treat people with behavioral health disorders and monitor their conditions. We need flexibility and creativity to allow clients access to mental health and addiction treatment services through various tele-behavioral health platforms.

Tele-behavioral health can also help improve efficiency and effectiveness of the mental health workforce and remove unnecessary obstacles to provide treatment to insured individuals who cannot leave the home environment during this crisis. Moreover, during this period, mental health providers should be incentivized to promote and utilize tele-behavioral health services, and receive reimbursement at the same rates as in-person visits.

The coronavirus is affecting all of us -- our families, our businesses, our communities, and our way of life – including our health care delivery systems. Removing any barriers for Americans seeking needed behavioral health care services during this time is needed. Allowing all qualified behavioral health providers to utilize tele-behavioral health services to treat their clients is a national health care imperative.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric T. Beeson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Eric T. Beeson, Ph.D.

President

American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA)