

FROM KATHERINE B. MCGUIRE, APA CHIEF ADVOCACY OFFICER

For the Week of July 15, 2019

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APA advocacy staff continue to work with policymakers from both sides of the aisle and the administration to raise awareness of non-opioid approaches to pain management. On Capitol Hill this week, we are also building support for legislation that would protect parity, lift restrictions on cannabis research, protect students in cases of fraud by their institutions, expand research into autism, support VA psychologists, and ensure health equity for all Americans.

Protecting Parity in ‘Surprise Billing’ Legislation

APA joined several national mental health groups representing patients, providers, advocates and family members in a [letter](#) to Senate and HELP Committee leadership raising concerns with the [Lower Health Care Costs Act](#) (S. 1895). A provision in the legislation would require health-care facilities, providers and payers to reach an agreement on a claim within 45 days. Failure to do so would not obligate the patient to pay their portion of the bill and would subject providers to a \$10,000 per day fine. While APA recognizes the need to protect patients from surprise medical bills, the association has begun to inform key Senate offices that the provision could lead payers to no longer negotiate with providers and facilities on appeals for mental and behavioral disorder claims denials.

For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at lstine@apa.org.

Promoting Psychological Approaches to Pain Management

The Voices for Non-Opioid Choices coalition—of which APA is a member—hosted a policy discussion on July 18 on the need for non-opioid pain management services to continue reducing opioid use disorders. APA provided its new [fact sheet](#) on psychological approaches to pain management to attendees. Sen. Jean Shaheen (D-N.H.) and Rep. David McKinley (R-W.V.) spoke about the impact the opioid epidemic is having on their communities and the need for continued congressional action. Admiral Brett Giroir, MD, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and senior advisor for opioid policy, emphasized the need for a multi-faceted response including continued improvements in pain management service delivery. He also spoke about the growing rate of overdose deaths related to methamphetamine and cocaine use, and how mental disorders, adverse childhood experiences, trauma and economic despair contribute to drug use and addiction.

For more information, contact Scott Barstow, MS, at sbarstow@apa.org or Laurel Stine, JD, at lstine@apa.org.

Seeking More Pay and Flexibility for VA Psychologists

For years, APA and the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders have urged Congress to include legislative language that would give psychologists who work for the Department of Veterans Affairs full Title 38 hiring/pay authority, which would allow for higher pay and hiring flexibility. As a result of our efforts, Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and his Republican co-sponsor, Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), added language that would grant VA psychologists Title 38 status as part of the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019. In a meeting with Tester's staff, APA countered efforts by the American Federal Government Employee Union to block this move. The legislation is now moving through the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee with APA's endorsement. We will continue to work to keep this language in the legislation as it comes to a vote later this fall.

For more information, contact Heather O'Beirne Kelly, PhD, at hkelly@apa.org

Backing the Medical Marijuana Research Act

On July 17, a bipartisan group of House members introduced the Medical Marijuana Research Act of 2019, the second of two major bills that seek to amend the Controlled Substances Act to reduce the regulatory burden surrounding cannabis research. As an early proponent of the bill, APA sent a [letter](#) endorsing the legislation and has worked closely with staff in the office of Rep. Andy Harris (R-M.D.) to secure support from 13 other scientific organizations. The bill would simplify the protocol review and security requirements associated with conducting cannabis research. The [press release](#) accompanying the bill cited a quote from APA CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD. "Without access to an expanded range of cannabis products, scientific research cannot hope to keep pace with the expanding recreational and medicinal cannabis marketplace," he said. "This bill will facilitate the rapid approval of applications to manufacture cannabis products from non-government sources, resulting in a supply that can meet the needs of cannabis researchers."

For more information, contact Geoff Mumford, PhD, at gmumford@apa.org.

Promoting Equitable Access to Health Care in U.S. Territories

APA President Rosie Phillips Davis, PhD signed a [letter](#) voicing support for legislation introduced by Rep. Stacey Plasket (D-V.I.) that seeks to increase access to health services for Americans who live in U.S. territories by lifting a cap on federal Medicaid matching funds and replacing it with a more equitable formula. With the territories facing high rates of poverty, the cap on federal Medicaid spending has reduced access to care. This provision aligns strongly with Dr. Phillips Davis' deep poverty initiative by elevating the role of psychology in understanding and attending to health disparities among minority and non-minority U.S. citizens.

For more information, contact Aaron Bishop, at abishop@apa.org.

Protecting Students Defrauded by Higher Education Institutions

APA expressed strong [support](#) for the Relief for Defrauded Students Act of 2019 (H.R.

3662). Championed by Rep. Lucy McBath (D-Ga.), this legislation was introduced in response to the closure of Argosy University earlier this year, which had severe consequences for doctoral psychology students enrolled at eight APA-accredited programs at Argosy institutions.

Speaking on the House floor, McBath mentioned the closure of Argosy's Atlanta campus in her district, and the need to protect students who have been left with debt and no paths to finish their educations. If enacted, H.R. 3662 would strengthen accountability within the Department of Education by enabling students to get much-needed student loan relief in cases of misconduct by institutions. Watch McBath discuss the legislation in this [video](#).

For more information, contact Alix Ginsberg at aginsberg@apa.org.

Supporting Passage of the Autism Research and Services Legislation

Autism affects an estimated one in 59 U.S. children. To address the growing need to better understand and provide services and supports to those affected by the disorder, the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a full committee markup of the reauthorization of [The Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education and Support \(Autism CARES\) Act \(H.R. 1058\)](#). This law is the primary source of federal funding for autism research, services, training and monitoring. APA has been a vocal proponent of the law's reauthorization and joined a letter by Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities that calls on lawmakers to pass the legislation in the 116th Congress.

For more information, contact Ben Vonachen, at bvonachen@apa.org.