Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition

December 16, 2025

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Thompson
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Barrasso and Representative Thompson.

We, the undersigned, are writing on behalf of the Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition to express our gratitude for your support of the Mental Health Access Improvement Act and to share the remarkable impact this legislation has achieved. The Coalition represents an unprecedented alliance of professional associations, health care organizations, and advocacy groups committed to strengthening behavioral health care for Medicare beneficiaries. Your commitment to expanding mental health care for older adults has produced one of the largest expansions of the Medicare behavioral health workforce in history. Today, over 75,000 mental health counselors (MHCs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs) are participating in the Medicare program, transforming mental health care access for older Americans. They have joined the nearly 100,000 clinical social workers to help meet the needs of the Medicare population.

Historic Progress

Your support for the 2022 Mental Health Access Improvement Act opened Medicare to mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists for the first time. The response has been extraordinary:

- **75,000+ mental health professionals enrolled** as Medicare providers in just two years,
- **Dramatically expanded geographic coverage**, especially in rural and underserved areas,
- **Specialized geriatric mental health expertise** now accessible to millions of beneficiaries, and
- **Unprecedented capacity** to address the mental health crisis among older adults.

This addresses critical needs:

- Nearly 20 percent of older adults experience depression,
- Millions of Medicare beneficiaries are affected by anxiety disorders, and
- COVID-19 intensified mental health challenges through isolation and loss.

Coalition Resource Hub Launched

To support this rapidly growing workforce, the Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition has launched a comprehensive resource hub – www.mmhwc.com – providing enrollment guidance, billing resources, policy updates, and educational materials for providers serving Medicare beneficiaries.

We are also pleased to inform you that the National Association of Social Workers and the Clinical Social Work Association have recently joined the Coalition. This expansion makes the Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition a unique alliance representing the full spectrum of master's-level mental health professionals—mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and clinical social workers—all committed to addressing the mental health needs of America's older adults and people with disabilities.

Looking Ahead

While celebrating this progress made possible by your leadership, we respectfully request your continued support for:

1. Permanent telehealth flexibilities for behavioral health services

Telehealth has become essential for delivering mental health care to Medicare beneficiaries, particularly for older adults in rural areas, those with mobility limitations, and individuals who face transportation or stigma barriers to in-person care. The Coalition strongly supports **H.R. 4206**, the *Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act of 2025*, which would permanently authorize many of the temporary telehealth flexibilities implemented during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Representative Mike Thompson with 153 co-sponsors and co-sponsored by Senator Barrasso in the Senate **(S. 1261)** with 65 co-sponsors, would allow Medicare beneficiaries to continue accessing telemental health services in their homes without mandatory in-person visit requirements. We thank you for your leadership on Medicare telehealth policy and urge your continued support to make these critical flexibilities permanent, ensuring sustained access to mental health care for older Americans.

2. Payment equity for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and clinical social workers

While the Mental Health Access Improvement Act granted Medicare eligibility to mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists, these providers—along with clinical social workers—are currently reimbursed at only 75% of the Medicare physician fee schedule, compared to 85% for other Medicare-eligible professionals such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners. This payment disparity creates a significant barrier to provider participation in Medicare, limiting access to mental health services for beneficiaries and undermining workforce recruitment and retention efforts.

The Coalition respectfully requests your support for legislation to increase the Medicare reimbursement rate for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and clinical social workers from 75% to 85% of the physician fee schedule. This increase would:

- **Expand access to care** by encouraging greater provider participation in Medicare
- **Align with other professionals** who receive 85% reimbursement for comparable services
- **Support workforce sustainability** by making Medicare participation financially viable for master's-level mental health providers
- **Promote equity** by ensuring that beneficiaries' choice of mental health provider is not limited by discriminatory payment policies

We are seeking your support to introduce legislation similar to the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act*, with the inclusion of mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, along with social workers. That legislation, introduced in the last Congress, could serve as a vehicle to increase reimbursement for MHCs, MFTs, and social workers

Payment equity is essential to sustaining the expanded mental health workforce created by the *Mental Health Access Improvement Act* and ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries can access the mental health care they need from qualified professionals.

3. Continued implementation support for the Mental Health Access Improvement Act

As the Medicare mental health workforce continues to grow, ongoing implementation support is critical to ensure that both providers and beneficiaries can successfully navigate the new system. The Coalition requests your support for efforts to:

- **Provide clear, accessible guidance** from CMS on enrollment, billing, and documentation requirements for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers.
- **Address administrative barriers** that may prevent eligible providers from enrolling or delay claims processing
- **Conduct beneficiary education and outreach** to ensure Medicare beneficiaries know they can access services from mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers.
- **Monitor implementation challenges** and work with CMS to resolve issues that affect provider participation or beneficiary access
- **Support technical assistance programs** that help providers transition into Medicare participation successfully

Sustained implementation support will maximize the impact of the *Mental Health Access Improvement Act* and ensure that the promise of expanded access becomes a reality in communities across the country.

4. Workforce development funding for geriatric mental health training

While 75,000 mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists and nearly 100,000 clinical social workers have enrolled as Medicare providers, significant workforce gaps remain—

particularly in rural and underserved areas and among providers with specialized training in geriatric mental health. Older adults present unique clinical considerations, including age-related cognitive changes, chronic illness, grief and loss, caregiver stress, and distinct pharmacological concerns that require specialized knowledge and skills.

The Coalition respectfully requests your support for increased federal funding for geriatric mental health workforce development, including:

- **Geriatric Mental Health Training Programs** that provide specialized education in assessment, diagnosis, and evidence-based treatment of mental health conditions in older adults

- **Loan repayment and scholarship programs** that incentivize mental health professionals to specialize in geriatric care and practice in underserved areas

- **Supervision and mentorship initiatives** that connect newly licensed providers with experienced geriatric mental health specialists

- **Continuing education programs** focused on best practices in geriatric mental health, including topics such as dementia care, suicide prevention in older adults, late-life depression and anxiety, and integrated behavioral health

- **Pipeline development programs** that encourage students from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in geriatric mental health counseling

Investing in geriatric mental health workforce development will ensure that the expanded Medicare provider network has the specialized expertise needed to deliver high-quality, age-appropriate mental health care to older Americans.

The 75,000 mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists now serving Medicare beneficiaries exist because of your leadership and commitment. Thank you for championing mental health access for older Americans. We welcome the opportunity to brief you or your staff on our continued work.

Respectfully,

(UNDERSIGNED COALITION GROUPS)

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Counseling Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Association for Counselor Education and Supervision
California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
Jewish Federations of North America
National Association of Social Workers
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing