

Mental Health Liaison Group Policy Principles **April 26, 2021**

The Mental Health Liaison Group is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, payers, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and addiction care. Together, we work in a nonpartisan manner to advance federal policies that strengthen prevention, early intervention, treatment, recovery services and supports, and address the disparities that currently exist in the social determinants of health (SDOH).

The following policy principles guide our national efforts and assist us in assessing issue areas for legislative and regulatory focus to advance our shared priorities.

Access to Care/Services

Fostering timely, comprehensive and equitable access to high-quality care is a critical component of improving mental health and addiction care in the United States.

- Patients must have equitable access to and coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services within the continuum of care and settings.
- Robust enforcement of federal parity requirements is vital to reducing the incidence and severity of these disorders.
- Policymakers should prioritize the removal of barriers to mental health and substance use disorder care in all areas of public or private coverage, including reimbursement.
- Policymakers should prioritize privacy of patient mental health and/or substance use information without inhibiting the authorized sharing of this information to ensure safe, effective, high quality treatment and care coordination.
- Policies should prioritize vulnerable populations such as children and older adults; veterans; military members and their families; low-income families; homeless and uninsured patients; Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color; at risk ethnic and cultural groups; LGBTQ individuals; and other underserved communities.
- Policies regarding effective mental health and substance use disorder care should recognize and address the social determinants of health as these factors directly impact access to treatment and treatment outcomes. Where appropriate, such policies should extend to housing, employment, education, transportation, and other support services.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Timely prevention and early intervention programs are essential to improving mental wellness, preventing and mitigating adverse childhood experiences and trauma, identifying and treating mental health and substance use conditions, mitigating suicide risk, and preventing substance use disorder before it starts.

- Mental health, substance use, and health promotion services, screenings, and/or resources should be provided and covered for adults, children, and youth.
 - Policymakers should ensure coverage of the Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) program.
 - Policymakers should protect the Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.
 - The Children’s Health Insurance Program has a proven track record of providing high-quality, cost-effective coverage, including mental health and substance use disorder services, and should continue to be supported and funded by federal and state policymakers.
- Understanding and mitigating adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and ensuring children and adolescent’s access to mental health and substance use disorder services in schools and communities are critical components of health care.
 - These services should include either comprehensive school or community-based professional resources for mental health and substance use disorder-related interventions and trauma-informed care.
- For pregnant women and mothers with infants, policies should include behavioral health screening followed up by services as needed.
- Substance use disorder prevention programs and policies are critical to ensure that children and families understand the risks associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Innovative Approaches

Mental health and disorder prevention and treatment should constantly evolve to reflect new and innovative approaches in order to better serve patients in America.

- Policymakers should carefully consider the impact on patients’ access to quality mental health and substance use disorder care and the impact on providers of such care when exploring new care, delivery, and payment models.
- Policymakers should strengthen integrated medical and behavioral health information technology (IT) to facilitate information-sharing to promote care coordination.

- Policymakers should expand telehealth coverage for mental health and substance use disorder services across all settings and through all health care payors. This should include access to an audio-only telehealth option where needed.
- A robust and diverse workforce that includes the full range of mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment, recovery, and support providers and specialists is essential to a behavioral health system that seeks to best meet the needs of people across the lifespan.
 - Such workforce capabilities should prioritize training programs, loan repayment programs, and scholarships, with incentives designed to increase minority participation and/or to encourage providers to work in remote and underserved areas.
- Policymakers should prioritize the ongoing development of a national mental health and suicide crisis system that includes effective crisis response.

Federal Funding & Research

Investment in prevention, treatment, and recovery for mental health and substance use disorders throughout the health system is vital for saving lives and reducing health system costs.

- Policymakers should fund research to develop effective, innovative approaches to behavioral health treatments.
- Policymakers should support research on health disparities and outcomes, prioritizing funding for programs for racial and ethnic minority populations and other underserved groups.
- Policy makers should fund increased data collection/surveillance for the risk and protective factors for mental illness.

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