

February 22, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Burr and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers,

The undersigned organizations are in support of the recent reintroduction of the Temporary Reciprocity to Ensure Access to Treatment (TREAT) Act (H.R. 708/S. 168) led by Senators Murphy (D-CT) and Blunt (R-MO) and Representatives Dingell (D-MI) and Latta (R-OH). The legislation would increase access to health care services during the national COVID-19 public health emergency by allowing practitioners with valid licenses to provide services, including telehealth services, in all states for the duration of the public health emergency. We urge the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the House Committee on Energy & Commerce to consider the TREAT Act within committee and advance the legislation.

The health care system has been stretched thin during the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening pre-existing provider shortages. The United States needs a strong health care workforce to effectively combat COVID-19 and its accompanying conditions.<sup>1</sup> With fewer providers, rural and disadvantaged communities are left even further behind. Prior to the pandemic, 75% of U.S. counties experienced severe shortages of mental health providers.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating a health care issue that has plagued large portions of the U.S. for decades.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation Tracking Poll conducted in early December of 2020, 51% of adults in the U.S. reported that their mental health had been negatively impacted by worry and stress over COVID-19. Only 39% of U.S. adults reported the same in May.<sup>3</sup> Many adults are also reporting specific negative impacts on their overall mental health and well-being due to worry and stress over the coronavirus, including difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in

<sup>1</sup> New AAMC Report Confirms Growing Physician Shortage. (2020, June 26). Retrieved from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-aamc-report-confirms-growing-physician-shortage>.

<sup>2</sup> Macher, D., Seidman, J., Gooding, M., & Diamond, C. (2020, May 11). *COVID-19 is Stressing a Fractured Mental Healthcare System in the US*. <https://avalere.com/insights/covid-19-is-stressing-a-fractured-mental-healthcare-system-in-the-us>.

<sup>3</sup> Lopes, L., Kearney, A., Kirzinger, A., Hamel, L., & Brodie, M. (2020, December 18). *KFF Health Tracking Poll – December 2020: COVID-19 and Biden's Health Care Agenda*. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-december-2020/>.

alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic mental health conditions (12%).<sup>4</sup> In addition, the report stated that ongoing and necessary public health measures create conditions linked to poor mental health outcomes, such as isolation and job loss.<sup>5</sup> Last, 51.83% of all telehealth diagnoses in September were mental health conditions, a figure that continued to rise monthly indicating that many Americans were turning to telehealth for pandemic-related stress.<sup>6</sup>

The TREAT Act aims to increase access to crucial health services during this time by temporarily permitting health professionals to practice across state lines. The bill stipulates that a provider who holds a valid license in any state (and is not barred in another state) can practice in accordance with applicable state law in every state during the national public health emergency and during a 180-day transition period after the declaration is lifted. When the Secretary of Health and Human Services has declared a public health emergency, and when the president has declared an emergency under the National Emergencies Act or the Stafford Act for at least 12 states, the Secretary may invoke this authority, thus expanding lifesaving services during times of need.

The TREAT Act will improve access to providers of all kinds, including mental health providers, by allowing individuals in areas experiencing shortages to access care from across the country. The legislation will provide increased flexibility for providers, potentially raising the number of providers willing and able to work during this national crisis. For these reasons and the health of your constituents, we urge you to bring the TREAT Act forward for consideration in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Thank you for your efforts to protect and expand Americans' access to important and necessary health services during this national emergency. We look forward to continuing to work with you to address mental health care needs throughout the country.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association of Suicidology

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

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<sup>4</sup> Panchal, N., Kamal, R., Orgera, K., Cox, C., Garfield, R., Hamel, L., . . . Chidambaram, P. (2020, August 21). The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Gelburd, R. (2020, December 1). *Telehealth Claims Rise 2980% in One-Year Period Through September 2020*. <https://www.ajmc.com/view/telehealth-claim-lines-rise-2980-in-one-year-period-through-september-2020>.

Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Centerstone  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Children's Hospital Association  
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists  
Consortium Representing Eating Disorders Care  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
EMDR International Association  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International OCD Foundation  
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Disability Directors  
National Association of Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Federation of Families  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Postpartum Support International  
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America  
SMART Recovery

The Jed Foundation

The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

The Trevor Project

Treatment Communities of America

Well Being Trust