



March 19, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
S-222, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
S-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

We are immensely pleased with the March 17 guidance issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) which expands Medicare telehealth during the COVID-19 public health emergency, stemming from the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2020. As national organizations representing mental health practitioners that provide the majority of Medicare mental health services, we are writing to request that *audio-only* services via telephone also be reimbursable by Medicare during this crisis. A number of states have already acted to provide audio-only access (in addition to video chat).

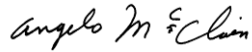
Millions of Medicare patients who are quarantined and/or physically distancing do not have cellphones with video chat capability, and/or do not know how to use this capability. They may also not have internet service or broadband speed. This is especially true for those residing in rural areas or who are lower income. At a time when older adults, particularly those with chronic conditions are vulnerable to COVID-19 and isolated in their homes, they need to be able to pick up a phone and connect easily with mental health providers.

Many beneficiaries have anxiety and depression or other mental health disorders that pre-dated COVID-19. Given the pandemic, still more older adults are presenting with these psychological challenges, making it even more important that mental health services be available to them during this pandemic. Disruption in mental health services can lead to avoidable crisis and far greater costs to Medicare.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact Anna Mangum, Deputy Director of Programs, at amangum.nasw@socialworkers.org or (202) 336-821 and

Laurel Stine, Senior Director of Congressional and Federal Relations and Partnerships, at lstine@apa.org or (202) 336-5875.

Sincerely,



Angelo McClain, PhD, LICSW
Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)



Arthur C. Evans, Jr., PhD
Chief Executive Officer
American Psychological Association (APA)

CC: The Hon. John Thune, Majority Whip, United States Senate
The Hon. Dick Durbin, Minority Whip, United States Senate
The Hon. Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader, United States House of Representatives
The Hon. Jim Clyburn, Majority Whip, United States House of Representatives
The Hon. Steve Scalise, Minority Whip, United States House of Representatives
The Hon. Charles Grassley, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
The Hon. Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee
The Hon. Lamar Alexander, Chairman, Senate HELP Committee
The Hon. Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee