



Government Affairs

Support Access to Mental Health Services for Seniors

Bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate would improve access to mental health services by permitting Licensed Professional Counselors to be reimbursed by Medicare. Medicare is the primary insurance provider for approximately 59 million Americans, including adults age 65 and older and younger people with long-term disabilities. These individuals cannot currently use Medicare to see a licensed professional counselor (LPC). This limits their access to mental health care, especially in rural communities where mental health professionals are much more likely to be LPCs. The *Mental Health Access Improvement Act* will enable the nation's 200,000 LPCs to be reimbursed for treating Medicare beneficiaries, and to help the seniors who need their services. ***Please cosponsor S. 286 and H.R. 945.***

- The number of Medicare beneficiaries is growing due to 10,000 members of the boomer generation turning 65 each day. These individuals are at-risk for serious mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse. A recent survey found that over 50% of practicing counselors had turned away potential clients due to this gap in Medicare reimbursement. This means people are going untreated.
- The opioid crisis is hitting Medicare beneficiaries hard, often due to their use of prescription painkillers, and Medicare is currently the largest single-payer for opioid-related hospitalizations. These individuals are unable to use their insurance coverage to access substance use treatment from LPCs.
- Current Medicare policy disrupts care. Over one-third of practicing counselors surveyed have worked with a client who transitions onto Medicare *while in treatment* due to age or disability. When this occurs, LPCs can no longer provide services and clients are left to look elsewhere for treatment, if they look at all. It means starting the therapy process all over.
- Medicare is the rare insurance program that does not cover LPCs. Medicaid, TRICARE, and private insurance plans provide access to counseling provided by LPCs.

Licensed Professional Counselors can play a vital role in fighting the opioid crisis, depression, and other mental health issues among Medicare beneficiaries. Please support the Mental Health Access Improvement Act.