



November 15, 2022

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
221 Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chair
U.S. House Committee on Energy and
Commerce
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Energy and
Commerce
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal
Chair
U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means
372 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chair Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, Chair Neal, and Ranking Member Brady,

As the 117th Congress comes to an end, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) applauds the bipartisan and bicameral efforts to address the national behavioral and mental health and substance use disorder crises. Meeting our nation's behavioral health needs at this juncture is critical. We greatly appreciate your respective leadership in advancing legislative proposals in a bipartisan fashion and believe now is the time to pass comprehensive behavioral and mental health legislation.

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Bipartisan Policy Center Action

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the unmet need for mental health and substance use services in the United States was significant. We know that less than half of adults with mental health conditions received services in 2019 and that individuals with substance use disorder still find it far too difficult to access needed services and treatments. The pandemic only exacerbated underlying challenges with our behavioral and mental health system, resulting in spikes in the rate of mental illness and suicides over the past two years. While Congress did take steps to promote access to behavioral and mental health services in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, more must be done to improve the health and well-being of Americans.

BPC Action supported the House passage of H.R. 7666 – The Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act of 2022, the package of mental health bills reported out of the Ways & Means Committee, and the release of several bipartisan discussion drafts aimed at improving behavioral health from the Senate Finance Committee. We are pleased to see several bipartisan recommendations from BPC reports – including our March 2021 report, [Tackling America’s Mental Health and Addiction Crisis Through Primary Care Integration](#), our April 2022 report, [Combating the Opioid Crisis: Smarter Spending to Enhance the Federal Response](#), and our June 2022 report, [Answering the Call—988: A New Vision for Crisis Response](#) – reflected in those legislative proposals.

As you undertake efforts to reconcile various proposals, we urge you to include bipartisan policy solutions, including:

- **Promoting the integration of behavioral health and primary care.**
 - BPC Action supports efforts to integrate behavioral health and primary care and is glad to see similar support reflected in the legislative proposals advanced by your committees. We particularly support the inclusion of strong financial incentives to promote the uptake of behavioral health integration as noted in the bipartisan Senate Finance Committee Integration, Coordination, and Access to Care discussion draft. We also support the expansion of value-based payment models to support integration, including the Collaborative Care Model (CoCM) and are pleased to see support for that included in both the Finance Committee’s Integration discussion draft as well as H.R. 7666.
- **Increasing provider capacity.**
 - BPC Action supports efforts to increase provider capacity and better leverage the workforce to improve patient access to care and support the Finance and Ways & Means Committees’ proposals to extend Medicare coverage of marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors. BPC Action also recommends and

support coverage of peer support specialists to provide behavioral health integration services within Medicare.

- **Supporting crisis response.**
 - BPC Action supports efforts to improve the nation’s crisis response infrastructure and urges inclusion of the bipartisan proposal to make permanent the Medicaid state option to provide community-based mobile crisis intervention services from the Senate Finance Committee Integration, Coordination, and Access to Care discussion draft. We also support proposals included in both the Finance Committee’s Integration discussion draft as well as H.R. 7666 that provide technical assistance to states.

- **Addressing substance use disorder.**
 - BPC Action supports efforts to tackle the nation’s opioids epidemic and urges reauthorization of critical programs such as the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant and State Opioid Response (SOR) Grants. We also support the provision included in H.R.7666 to eliminate the requirement for clinicians known as the Drug Addiction Treatment Act (DATA 2000) or X Waiver. Both parties recognize that the X waiver limits workforce capacity and thus access to care for some of our most vulnerable Americans.

- **Tele-mental health.**
 - BPC Action supports the committees’ efforts to extend telehealth services for behavioral and mental health care. BPC recommends extending most of the Medicare telehealth flexibilities for two years following the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) to allow additional evaluation of the impacts of expanded access to telehealth services.

We understand that solving the national behavioral and mental health and substance use disorder crises requires bipartisan cooperation and pragmatic solutions. We believe that now is the time to further strengthen our ability to solve these problems and encourage Congress to pass comprehensive and bipartisan behavioral and mental health and substance use legislation before the end of the 117th Congress. We appreciate and thank you for your work on this issue.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Stockwell".

Michele Stockwell
Executive Director
Bipartisan Policy Center Action

Cc:
Senate Majority Leader Schumer
Senate Minority Leader McConnell
Speaker Pelosi
Minority Leader McCarthy

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