



Eating Disorders Coalition Praises Letters from Congress to the Department of Defense Urging Coverage for TeleMental Health Services During COVID-19

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 11, 2020) — The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) applauds the House of Representatives and Senate letters urging the Department of Defense's Defense Health Agency (DHA) to permit telehealth service coverage, including mental health, under TRICARE during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bipartisan House letter, led by House Armed Services Committee Members Reps. Veronica Escobar (D-TX), Michael R. Turner (R-OH), and Seth Moulton (D-MA), and signed by an additional 30 members of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) can be read [here](#). The Senate letter led by Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Members Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ) can be read [here](#). With up to 8% of servicemembers and 21% of military children affected by eating disorders, it is essential that eating disorders care is available virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to advocacy efforts involving the EDC and the TRICARE for Kids Coalition, TRICARE removed telehealth restrictions for Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOPs) in an April 23rd [guidance](#). However, TRICARE still does not permit telehealth for Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHPs)/Day programs, despite the growing national trend for virtual coverage.

The letters urge the DHA to ensure telehealth services, including mental health services, are covered under TRICARE at all outpatient levels of care including PHP, and to ensure that providers are reimbursed for telehealth services at the same level as in-person care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended providers increase the use of telemedicine as an alternative to in-person visits, to limit the virus's spread and ensure the safety of providers and patients. With other federally funded health systems like the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) already taking steps to expand Medicare telehealth coverage, the letters urge TRICARE to follow this national trend.

Through the leadership of the EDC, the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) also sent a [letter](#) to HASC and SASC leadership, urging the Committees to take action during the next COVID-19 relief legislative package to temporarily loosen telehealth restrictions and ensure payment parity for telemental health visits under TRICARE.

With eating disorders thriving in isolation, it is of the utmost importance that both military and civilian Americans affected by eating disorders can access the care they need throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can also be found at eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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