

July 6, 2022

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
United States Senate
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith and Senator Moran:

The undersigned organizations write in support of your legislation, the *Improving Access to Behavioral Health Integration Act* (S. 4306). These organizations represent an array of consumers, families, advocates, practitioner groups and other stakeholders that share a common goal of improving access to quality mental and behavioral health care.

Our nation's healthcare system is fragmented and underfunded as the country confronts an unprecedented crisis of mental health burden. Even prior to the opioid epidemic and COVID pandemic, 50% of adult Americans with a behavioral health condition received no behavioral care at all, and 2019 CDC survey data showed more than 1 in 3 high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan. Since then, an unprecedented growth in behavioral health problems has affected all segments of the American population, from children and youth to adults. Given the present situation, it is clearly time for an 'all hands on deck' approach to expanding access to mental health and substance use treatment.

One important way to accomplish this is by integrating evidence-based behavioral health care services and providers into primary care settings. As shown by both the experience of health care systems across the country and a large body of research, team-based care incorporating mental health service providers into primary care practices can increase access to behavioral health services, improve patient outcomes, increase the efficiency of primary care practices, and reduce treatment costs. Integrating behavioral health services into the primary care setting also helps reduce the stigma associated with behavioral health treatment. But despite its promise, adoption of evidence-based integrated care has been challenging, particularly for small and independent primary care practices, due to the considerable costs associated with practice changes including training and hiring staff, upgrading and standardizing health information systems, and implementing new operating procedures.

Your legislation would provide direct support to both pediatric and adult primary care practices to help them overcome these initial hurdles, prioritizing small practices and those operating in health professional shortage areas, and in Tribal or other medically underserved communities where the need is greatest. It would also prioritize assistance to primary care practices that can demonstrate a pathway to financially sustaining integrated care services beyond the initial grant period.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing this important behavioral health legislation. We urge its adoption by Congress and look forward to working with you on this and other health policy issues.

Sincerely,
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselor Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
Lakeshore Foundation
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Federation of Families
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National League for Nursing
NHMH – No Health without Mental Health
REDC Consortium
RI International
SMART Recovery
The Kennedy Forum
Trust for America's Health