primary care collaborative

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November 7, 2024

The Honorable Thomas Carper
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Margaret Hassan
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Carper, Cassidy and Hassan,

We write to thank you for your leadership in response to the child mental health crisis and express Primary Care Collaborative's strong support for S.2556 - Improving CARE for Youth Act. The Improving CARE for Youth Act would remove same-day billing restrictions for primary care and mental health services in Medicaid and take an important, common-sense step to address the youth mental health crisis.

PCC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan multi-stakeholder coalition of 67 organizational Members ranging from clinicians and patient advocates to employer groups and health plans. PCC's members share a commitment to an equitable, high-value health care system with a strong foundation of primary care: care that emphasizes comprehensiveness, longitudinal relationships and "upstream" drivers for a better patient experience and better health outcomes. (See the Shared Principles of Primary Care).

Faced with an epidemic of poor mental health, American children are suffering, and they continue to go without needed care. It has been three years since the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health[1]. Supporting child mental health cannot wait. A 2016 National Survey of Children's Health found that one in six U.S. children between the ages of 6 and 17 had a treatable mental health condition such as depression, anxiety problems or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)[2].

[1]AACAP, "Pediatricians, CAPs, and Children's Hospitals Declare National Emergency," October 19, 2021, https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/zLatest_News/Pediatricians_CAPs_Childrens_Hospitals_Declare_National_Emergency_Childrens_Mental_Health.aspx.
[2]Daniel G. Whitney and Mark D. Peterson, "US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children," *JAMA Pediatrics* 173, no. 4 (February 11, 2019): 389, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.5399.

By allowing same-day primary care and behavioral health services while simultaneously removing financial barriers, the Improving CARE for Youth Act will promote access to comprehensive, coordinated health care for Medicaid beneficiaries and make it easier for children to access mental health services. Same-day services can reduce time missed at work and other costs associated with in-person appointments, as well as barriers of distance in rural and underserved communities. It also promotes primary care-behavioral health integration, a top priority for PCC and its members. Such integration can ease access challenges faced by rural communities and may help reduce mental health disparities for Latino and Black populations[3].

In the midst of a growing mental health crisis for children across the country, it is critical that barriers to child mental health care be removed. This bill is a vital step in the right direction towards the kind of whole-person primary care, with robust integration of behavioral health, needed in every American community[4]. Today, a shrinking, and overstretched primary care workforce is seeing an increasing proportion of patients seeking mental health care – but often without the resources and support of a robust, integrated primary care team. By reducing barriers to receiving same-day care at primary care practices and clinics, the U.S. can most appropriately leverage behavioral health professionals to help children on Medicaid receive timely and accessible healthcare and reduce the burden on primary care clinicians

Youth in the US are living through an unprecedented mental health crisis. By passing S.2556, Congress has an opportunity to give children covered by Medicaid, and the clinicians who care for them, the support they need. PCC stands ready to work with you in moving this legislation forward. If you have further questions or would like to speak more in depth on any of these issues, please contact PCC's Director of Policy, Larry McNeely (lmcneely@thepcc.org).

Sincerely,



Ann Greiner
President & CEO
Primary Care Collaborative

[3]Primary Care Collaborative, "Primary Care and Behavioral Health: Just the Facts," 2023, https://thepcc.org/sites/default/files/resources/behavior-health-integration.pdf.
[4]Alison Huffstetler et al., "Health Is Primary: Charting a Path to Equity and Sustainability," 2023, https://thepcc.org/sites/default/files/resources/pcc-evidence-report-2023.pdf?utm_source=bitly&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=2023_evidence.