



AATA Signs Joint Letter of Support for Medicaid Coverage for People Living with Mental or Substance Use Disorders

AATA

March 2, 2017

AATA joins 41 other mental health organizations in signing a [joint letter](#) protecting medical coverage for vulnerable populations, specifically people living with mental health or substance use disorders. The letter, sent to the Hill earlier this afternoon, was facilitated by the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), addresses Speaker Paul Ryan, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Democratic Minority Leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer and opposes recent proposals that would restructure the federal-state financing partnership of the Medicaid program.

Medicaid, the single largest payer for behavioral health services in the United States (accounting for approximately 26 percent of behavioral health spending), is crucial for the wellbeing of low-income Americans living with mental or substance abuse disorders. One in five of Medicaid's nearly 70 million beneficiaries have a mental or substance use disorder diagnosis. Furthermore, the state expansion has been proven vital for access to behavioral health treatment among the most vulnerable Americans. About 29 percent (3 million people) of low-income persons who receive health insurance coverage through the state Medicaid expansion program have a mental or substance use disorder. Of the [32 states](#) that have adopted the Medicaid expansion, in those states that have been particularly hard hit by the opioid crisis, such as Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, Medicaid pays between 35 to 50 percent of medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders.

The letter warns that “recent proposals that would restructure the long-standing and fundamental federal-state financing partnership of the Medicaid program” could “adversely impact the 14 million vulnerable people living with mental or substance use disorders who depend heavily on Medicaid coverage.” It further asserts that “although details of current proposals have not yet been released, based on past proposals, we believe that converting Medicaid into a block grant or a per capita cap would shift significant costs to states up front, and over time. Experts have forecasted a 30 to 40 percent cut in the federal share of Medicaid over 10 years.” In conclusion, “states will be forced to reduce their Medicaid rolls, benefits, and already low payment rates to an already scarce workforce of behavioral health providers. Mental health and substance use

disorder treatments and programs will be at high risk.”

The MHLG is a coalition of more than 60 national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, payers, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans’ access to mental health and substance use services and programs. AATA is proud to be a MHLG member, in the company of our friends from dozens of mental health associations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, and the American Dance Therapy Association. Our participation enables the AATA to stay apprised of critical legislation impacting the communities served by art therapists, and to attend MHLG monthly meetings, Congressional briefings, educational seminars, and related events throughout the year.

