

Policy At A Glance:

Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act of 2022 (H.R. 7666)

H.R. 7666 aims to expand and reauthorize over 30 programs in a multi-pronged approach to increase easier access to mental health services and reduce the stigma related to substance use disorders.

Introduction

In 2020, 21% of adults and 16.5% of youth ages 6-17 in the United States experienced mental illness. Additionally, 6.7% of adults in the United States struggled with concomitant mental health conditions and substance use disorder.¹ The consequences of the pandemic have extended past COVID-19 related deaths, creating the emergence of an epidemic of mental health disorders as a result of the disruption in daily routines. According to a scientific brief released by the World Health Organization in March of 2022, the prevalence of depression and anxiety have increased globally by 25%, affecting primarily women and younger populations² and exposing the gap in prompt access to mental health services. While suicide rates overall continued to decrease throughout the pandemic despite the increase in rates of mental health conditions, with the exception of adolescents,³ another epidemic continued to worsen: the ever-increasing rates of drug related-deaths in the United States,⁴ which has been deemed a public health crisis. Thus, H.R. 7666, which was recently passed in the House of Representatives,⁵ aims to increase access to mental health services and optimize treatment availability for mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

Relevant Dates for H.R. 7666

- 5/6/2022** Introduced in the United States House of Representatives by Rep. Frank Pallone Jr.
- 6/13/2022** Amended by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
- 6/22/2022** Passed in the House of Representatives
- 6/23/2022** Received in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

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Key Provisions for Substance Use Disorders

Substance use disorders (SUD) have significantly increased over the past several decades. Given the substantial risk of drug-related overdose deaths, this bipartisan bill focuses on expanding and reauthorizing programs that prevent, treat, and provide recovery services for those with SUD. In particular, the bill modifies grants supporting pediatric provider entities and community-based coalitions to decrease underage drinking through culturally-appropriate screenings and interventions, grants for implementing mobile medication units to augment timely patient access for treatment for opioid use disorders,⁶ and grants for jail diversion programs. This bill also supports projects related to transition from homelessness and promotes collaboration between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) and community organizations which specialize in recovery housing, providing services and increasing availability of high-quality housing for those undergoing SUD treatment.⁷

Additionally, the Synthetic Opioids Public Awareness Campaign will provide training and outreach on evidence regarding synthetic opioids to providers, law enforcement, emergency medical services personnel and other high-risk occupations to address gaps in knowledge regarding these harmful substances that have led to a recent spike in drug-related deaths. Mandatory training for prescribers of controlled substances will continue to be enforced and states will be incentivized to facilitate responsible dispensing of controlled substances.⁷

Lastly, the bill specifically aims to eliminate stigmatizing language related to substance use by modifying the verbiage related to substance use and replacing “substance abuse” with “substance use disorder.”⁷

The Anna Westin Legacy Act

The Anna Westin Legacy Act was passed by Congress within the 21st Century Cures Act in 2016 as the first legislation to address those affected by eating disorders. It honors Anna Westin, a 21-year old woman who took her own life after years of battling severe anorexia. This act is now part of H.R. 7666 and will reauthorize and expand services provided by the National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders, with the intent to educate and train health care professionals to identify, offer early screening, and provide treatment of diagnosed eating disorders as part of improving mental health.⁸



Key Provisions for Mental Health

Overview

H.R. 7666 aims to reauthorize, modify and expand over 30 programs to increase access to mental health services for children, adolescents, and adults. Grants and awards will be provided to eligible entities to support integration of culturally-sensitive and linguistically appropriate mental health services to screen, diagnose, and timely treat individuals in various settings with the purpose of reducing disparities in health care.⁷

Mental Health for Children & Adolescents

The bill supports enhanced access to mental health services by reauthorizing and modifying the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access grant. This grant will provide funds to existing entities for expansion of programs established with local community partners to provide comprehensive mental health services to children and adolescents through the utilization of telehealth, school-based health centers, primary care facilities and inpatient treatment centers. Additionally, coverage provided through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program will aim to reduce financial limitations and administrative barriers for juveniles in underserved populations and those in public institutions by facilitating provider credentialing and telehealth implementation, with the goal to reduce disparities in at-risk children and adolescents.⁷

Mental Health for Adults

The Community Mental Health Services Block grant and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline are two major grants to be reauthorized and modified under this bill. The bill significantly increases funding to support improvement of integrated health services bidirectionally to care for those with concomitant mental and physical health needs, including reduction in barriers to access by increasing the number of trained behavioral health staff to provide services in primary care settings. Additionally, programs focusing on suicide prevention, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, will receive supplemental funds to adequately coordinate resources, ensuring those who are seeking mental health services in crisis receive timely treatment.⁷

Mental Health for Special Populations

Modifications to add extra grant funding will focus on improving mental health wellness in certain populations, including women who are pregnant and up to 12 months postpartum, veterans, members of the Armed Forces, first responders (i.e. emergency medical services and law enforcement personnel), and tribal populations.⁷ Reauthorization of programs to strengthen the behavioral health and healthcare workforce will also enable easier access to mental health services in emergency departments and inpatient mental healthcare facilities.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented rise in mental health conditions, exposing the gap in mental health services across the United States. The critical need for prompt access to mental health services and substance use disorder treatment has become a priority for which H.R. 7666 aims to address. The Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act of 2022 will ensure that culturally-appropriate care can be given to all populations and close the gap in disparities that are currently in place by augmenting the behavioral health workforce, providing evidence-based training for those delivering care, and reducing financial and administrative barriers that often lead to delay in care. Additionally, H.R. 7666 requires self-funded health plans to comply with parity requirements⁹ and mandates transparency in pharmacy benefit manager transactions to alleviate the burdens associated with mental healthcare coverage, thus improving quality of life and reducing preventable deaths. Since there is bipartisan support for this bill, H.R. 7666 will likely pass out of the Senate in due time.

References

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Did you know?

Recently, the United States designated 988 as the new National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. If you or someone you know is struggling and need help, call/text 988 or use the chat function at 988lifeline.org. For more background information about the Lifeline, check out IHPL's [September 1st blog](#).



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