

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 02, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

We write regarding the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) coverage of acute inpatient mental health care for beneficiaries. Under VA current regulations, CHAMPVA does not cover mental health inpatient treatment for more than 30 days per fiscal year for patients age 19 and older. For individuals under 19 years old, CHAMPVA may authorize up to 45 days of inpatient mental health services per annum. As Co-Chairmen of the Military Mental Health Taskforce and members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, we are concerned with this restriction of care and ask for the VA to apply mental health parity to CHAMPVA.

In 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), which prevents commercial health insurers that provide mental health or substance use disorder benefits from imposing more restrictive benefit limitations on those benefits than on medical and surgical benefits. MHPAEA has improved U.S. behavioral health care coverage considerably and established the idea of "conceptual parity" between physical and mental illness in the public discourse. Conceptual parity is based on the idea that behavioral health care conditions should not be treated in ways that are unequal to how we treat physical illness.

Since MHPAEA, various federal agencies have reviewed their rules and regulations to see if they comply with "conceptual parity." The most notable example has been the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which in 2016, partially lifted its prohibition on Medicaid managed care beneficiaries accessing inpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

In Fiscal Year 2017, CHAMPVA had 478,600 enrollees with approximately 361,900 users. According to the National Association of Mental Illness, one in five children experience a severe mental illness during childhood, and one in 25 adults experience a serious mental illness in a given year. Given these alarming statistics, we respectfully request that the Department of Veterans Affairs review CHAMPVA's policies as they relate to "conceptual parity" and begin first by addressing their limitation on mental health inpatient treatment.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We appreciate your service to the nation and commitment to our veterans.

Very respectfully,



Guy Reschenthaler  
Member of Congress



Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

*Anthony Brindisi*

Anthony Brindisi  
Member of Congress

*Max*

Max Rose  
Member of Congress

*Conor Lamb*

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