

# Stronger enforcement of mental health parity law needed to address impact of coronavirus

April 16 2021, by Sophie Bethune

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The pandemic's effect on Americans' mental health is illustrating the need for stronger enforcement of the federal health parity law, which mandates that employers that offer mental health coverage provide it on

the same footing as coverage offered for physical health conditions, according to the American Psychological Association.

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act has fallen short of its promise, APA Chief of Psychology in the Public Interest Brian Smedley, Ph.D., [told a congressional panel](#). "Congress can do more to ensure adequate oversight and enforcement of insurers' compliance with the law," he said.

Testifying before the House Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions, Smedley noted that as with the physical effects of COVID-19, "not all Americans are equally affected." Smedley noted that frontline health care workers, including psychologists, communities of color and children and [young adults](#) are experiencing higher rates of stress, anxiety and fear than the population as a whole.

"The COVID-19 pandemic worsened what was already a mental health tsunami in this country," said Smedley. "Research suggests we may be grappling with the mental health impact of this pandemic long after the pandemic itself ends. We must do more to improve access to mental health treatment for those who need it."

Smedley also noted that a loophole in the parity law is leaving many essential frontline workers without mental health insurance coverage.

APA called on Congress to:

- Enhance the federal parity law by passing the Parity Enforcement Act of 2021 (H.R. 1364), which would strengthen the Department of Labor's authority to enforce the law;
- Increase funding to support stronger federal oversight and enforcement of insurers' compliance with the federal parity law;

- Close the loophole that allows states to opt out of parity requirements for state employees—many of whom are frontline service providers responding to the pandemic;

Support the Tele-Mental Health Improvement Act (H.R. 2264), to improve access to telehealth services for mental health treatment by private sector health insurance plans during the public health emergency.

Smedley applauded the committee for examining the long-term behavioral [health](#) effects of the [pandemic](#) and urged the committee to "support an approach to this crisis that provides equitable access to care and preventive interventions to avert worse patient outcomes further downstream."

Provided by American Psychological Association

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