



February 27, 2020

BOSTON, MA - Today the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office announced the results of a longstanding behavioral health parity investigation. The settlement, arriving on the heels of Senate passage of the Mental Health ABC Act, enforces federal parity laws regarding reliability of provider directories, determination of reimbursement rates, and use of prior authorization.

The Children's Mental Health Campaign applauds Attorney General Maura Healey and her team on the settlement to address persistent inequities in health insurers' application of care management and the reimbursement of providers of behavioral health services delivered to residents of the Commonwealth. Agreements to honor the letter and the spirit of the federal parity law serve to end discriminatory practices that disadvantage and needlessly stress individuals and families seeking timely access to behavioral health care.

"Managing a behavioral health or mental health crisis is tremendously stressful for families," says Eva Stahl in her testimony. "Parents and caregivers need reliable tools."

Today's enforcement actions represent AG Healey's ongoing work in dismantling barriers to behavioral health care in the Commonwealth. "The needs are great; the lines are long. We're going to lower some of the barriers that stand between patients and behavioral health care coverage," says AG Healey in today's press conference.

"With approximately one in five children and adolescents experiencing symptoms of a diagnosable behavioral health disorder each year, it is imperative that access to and coverage of behavioral health care be equal to physical health care," says MSPCC Executive Director Mary McGeown. "Enforcement of parity laws has long been a missing piece in this puzzle, and we applaud the Attorney General for her commitment to ensuring compliance and championing behavioral health care reform." This settlement is, in fact, one of the first times an Attorney General's office has enforced federal parity laws.

"While the existing parity laws are critically important, Attorney General Maura Healey's ongoing and strong commitment to enforcing the parity laws shows that there is still much work to do to ensure consumers can access mental health care when needed" says Wells Wilkinson, a senior staff attorney with Health Law Advocates.

Enforcement of mental health parity laws bolsters provisions of the Mental Health ABC Act. “The Attorney General’s efforts represent a significant step forward in access to behavioral health services for Massachusetts consumers,” says Amy Rosenthal, Executive Director of Health Care For All. “The settlement complements ongoing work to increase the accuracy of provider directories, as well as to address issues that will be helpful to bring more behavioral health providers into health insurance networks.”

In 2018, 57% of adults who sought behavioral health care had difficulty obtaining it; 36% who sought mental health care or treatment for substance use disorders had problems paying family medical bills. These new requirements are a step in the right direction and will improve access to care for more than one million Massachusetts residents.

THE CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN is a large statewide network that advocates for policy, systems, and practice solutions and shared responsibility among government and institutions to ensure that all children in Massachusetts have access to resources to prevent, diagnose, and treat mental health issues in a timely, effective, and compassionate way.

The CMHC Executive Committee consists of six highly reputable partner organizations: The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Boston Children’s Hospital, the Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Health Care for All, Health Law Advocates, and the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health. The CMHC network includes more than 200 organizations across Massachusetts.