

Department of Labor Hosts Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Task Force Listening Session

July 8, 2016

The Obama Administration has taken great leaps forward in ensuring that people with mental health and substance use disorders are able to access the care they need. Progress on mental health and substance use disorder parity – ensuring that health coverage for mental health and substance use treatment is comparable to coverage for medical and surgical care – is a critical component of this development. But despite these improvements, there is much more to do.

On June 29, 2016, the Department of Labor, together with the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Health and Human Services, and representatives from the White House, hosted a listening session at the Department of Labor to engage stakeholders in a discussion about mental health and substance use disorder parity implementation. Several members of the President's Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Task Force (Task Force) and six stakeholders representing employer-sponsored health plans, insurers, and managed behavioral health organizations spoke about implementation and how the Administration can move forward to best ensure that the promise of mental health and substance use disorder parity is fulfilled. After the testimony of these stakeholders, members of the audience were invited to offer additional comments and suggestions.

The listening session commenced with opening remarks from several Task Force representatives acknowledging the devastation that mental illness and substance use disorder can cause without proper treatment. They emphasized the Administration's efforts to ensure that consumers are able to realize the benefits of parity protections and that individuals have access to the care necessary to treat their conditions. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), the Affordable Care Act, and Medicaid/CHIP have extended parity protections to over 170 million individuals, and the Administration is committed to working with stakeholders to identify best practices, identify gaps in guidance, and implement actions to advance parity.

Throughout their remarks, stakeholders emphasized their commitment to parity and to providing comprehensive behavioral health benefits. Health plans talked about their efforts to come into compliance with parity. Stakeholders highlighted that MHPAEA is a complex law requiring sophisticated analysis and expressed their desire to work with the Administration in an ongoing, open dialogue to achieve full implementation.

Stakeholders also underscored the challenge of ensuring access to care and the need to implement parity in a manner that effectively addresses this issue. Throughout their remarks, stakeholders highlighted key shared goals of expanding access to quality care for mental health conditions and substance use disorders, as well as promoting better integration of care for mental health conditions and substance use disorders with medical/surgical care.

In the weeks ahead, the Task Force will carefully consider these as well as other comments from previous listening sessions and written comments from other interested parties. Your input can help us build on the progress we've made for millions of Americans. Please submit your written comments via the Task Force website at www.hhs.gov/parity or by email at parity@hhs.gov by August 15, 2016.