



Tomorrow's Doctors, Tomorrow's Cures®

Focusing on Mental and Behavioral Health Care

The AAMC is committed to advancing policies that enable providers to deliver high-quality behavioral health care to their patients and equip medical students, residents, and fellows with the skills to succeed in integrated and interdisciplinary care teams. We urge Congress, the administration, and other policymakers to consider the following recommendations.

Expand and Extend the Behavioral Health Workforce

A symptom of the larger physician shortage, the current behavioral health workforce is insufficient to meet the growing demand for mental health care associated with the trauma and disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges that predate the pandemic.^{1,2} Because of this lack of providers, many individuals face significant barriers to accessing mental health care, including long wait times, transportation challenges, and high out-of-pocket costs.³

Invest in the behavioral health workforce: The AAMC supports measures that would strengthen our nation's current and future behavioral health workforce through critical investments in education and training. To achieve this goal, the AAMC endorses the following legislation:


- The Opioid Workforce Act of 2021 (S.1438)/Substance Use Disorder Workforce Act (H.R. 3441), which would increase the number of Medicare-supported graduate medical education (GME) residency positions in addiction medicine, addiction psychiatry, pain medicine, or the associated prerequisites by 1,000 positions between fiscal year (FY) 2024 and FY 2028.⁴
- The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2021 (H.R. 2256/S. 834), which would increase the number of Medicare-supported GME positions by 2,000 per year for seven years, for a total of 14,000 new positions, to expand the physician workforce across the country.⁵ This meaningful investment in the health care workforce would help increase the number of behavioral health providers, thereby expanding access to mental health care.

Extend the capacity of the existing behavioral health workforce: In addition to long-term investments in expanding the behavioral health workforce, the AAMC supports policies that increase the capacity of the existing workforce to efficiently respond to patients' care needs. The AAMC urges Congress and the administration to implement policies that enable providers to effectively leverage technology, including telehealth modalities, to reach more patients, including:

- **Remove barriers to telemental health services:** The AAMC greatly appreciates Congress' decision to temporarily extend pandemic-related regulatory flexibilities, but more must be done to ensure that patients can access telemental health care. Specifically, we urge Congress to remove the requirement that patients attend an initial in-person visit no more than six months prior to receiving telemental health services. In addition, because of the significant infrastructure investments needed to conduct a successful telehealth visit, the AAMC recommends that telemental health visits receive the reimbursement rates equivalent to those provided for in-person visits.⁶⁻⁷

The current behavioral health workforce is insufficient to meet the growing demand for mental health care, necessitating increased investment in Medicare-supported graduate medical education.



A photograph of two healthcare professionals, a man and a woman, both wearing white lab coats and blue surgical masks. They are looking intently at a tablet computer held by the man. The background is a soft, out-of-focus clinical setting. The entire image has a light blue color overlay.

Integrated behavioral health involves a multidisciplinary team of medical and behavioral health providers working together to address the medical, behavioral, and social factors that affect a patient's health and well-being.

Promote the Use of Integrated Behavioral Health Models


Integrated behavioral health (IBH) involves a multidisciplinary team of medical and behavioral health providers working together to address the medical, behavioral, and social factors that affect a patient's health and well-being. Integrated behavioral health models embed behavioral health services in primary or specialty care settings, thereby reducing the stigma surrounding mental health care and expanding access to care. The AAMC recommends that policymakers take the following steps to promote access to integrated behavioral health care:

- **Increase access to IBH models for Medicaid beneficiaries:** Medicaid is the largest payer for mental health and substance use disorder treatment in the United States,⁸ and, nationally, approximately half of children are covered by Medicaid or CHIP.⁹ Health care providers face significant financial and logistical challenges to providing this population with integrated behavioral health care, including state-level policies that prohibit Medicaid reimbursement for physical and behavioral health services furnished on the same day and insufficient financial support for care management activities. The AAMC urges Congress and the administration to expand access to integrated behavioral health care for Medicaid beneficiaries through payment methodologies that incentivize same-day care and by creating sustainable financing mechanisms to support these models, including the establishment of dedicated Medicaid payment codes.
- **Invest in training to promote access to IBH patient care models:** HRSA Title VII and Title VIII grant programs, such as the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Demonstration Program and the Graduate Psychology Education Program, are integral to financing health professions training programs that support innovative, interdisciplinary IBH patient care models. The AAMC and the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition urge Congress to provide \$1.51 billion for HRSA Title VII health professions and Title VIII nursing workforce development programs for FY 2023.¹⁰

Ensure Access to Behavioral Health Care

The AAMC supports policies that expand access to affordable, comprehensive health insurance coverage, particularly for low-income individuals, children and young people, and the perinatal population. However, coverage alone does not guarantee access to mental health care. Even individuals with health insurance coverage struggle to identify behavioral health providers who are in-network, and this problem is particularly acute for Medicaid beneficiaries. For this reason, the AAMC also supports policies to improve access to care for Medicaid beneficiaries by enhancing the adequacy of the behavioral health provider network.

- **Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for all providers, including specialty and subspecialty physicians:** Many providers, including specialty and subspecialty physicians, decline to participate in Medicaid provider networks due to low reimbursement rates. Comparatively low Medicaid reimbursement rates limit access to in-network behavioral health specialists; only 36% of psychiatrists accept new Medicaid patients.¹¹ The AAMC urges Congress and the administration to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for specialty and subspecialty physicians, including behavioral health providers, thereby enhancing network adequacy for Medicaid beneficiaries.¹² The AAMC endorses the Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act (H.R. 7236), which would increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric mental health services to Medicare rates through a 100% federal match.¹³
- **Close the Medicaid coverage gap:** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has dramatically expanded access to coverage by incentivizing states to extend Medicaid eligibility to additional low-income individuals. However, in states that have failed to enact Medicaid expansion, many individuals report income levels that are simultaneously too high to qualify for Medicaid and yet below the threshold to qualify for ACA marketplace subsidies (i.e., 100% of the federal poverty level). According to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation, over two million poor and uninsured adults fall into this so-called "coverage gap."¹⁴ To expand access to coverage for these individuals, the AAMC supports policies to address the coverage gap by providing new expansion states with a 100% federal matching rate (the same incentive received by expansion states in 2014).¹⁵
- **Expand access to Medicaid for birthing people:** The time frame before and after the birth of a child is critically important to ensuring the psychological health of both the parent and the child. To ensure that parents receive the care they need to thrive, the AAMC supports policies that extend continuous Medicaid eligibility for pregnant individuals up to 12 months postpartum.

A woman with dark hair is holding a baby in her arms while talking on a mobile phone. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. The overall tone is professional and informative.

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