

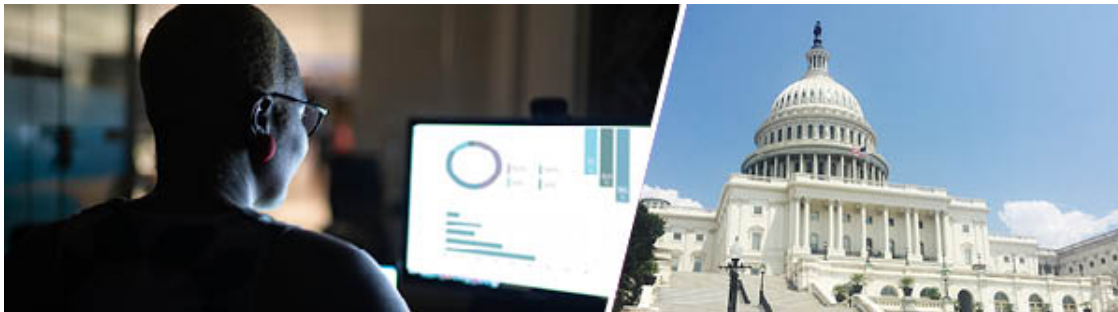
APA ADVOCACY *Washington Update*

To view this email as a web page, click [here](#).

For more information and resources on COVID-19, visit [APA's webpage](#) for psychologists, health-care workers and the public.

APA Advocacy Washington Update is a newsletter that highlights how APA is working to advance the discipline and practice of psychology on Capitol Hill and beyond. Learn more about APA's [advocacy priorities](#) for 2020.

Urging Congress to Provide Emergency Funding for Mental Health



Last week, the House of Representatives passed its latest COVID-19 relief package, the [HEROES Act](#). This sweeping legislation contains a number of provisions to help providers serving patients during the COVID-19 emergency crisis. While the bill does not include Medicare provisions related to psychologists' reimbursement and autonomy in the program, APA successfully pushed for the inclusion of emergency funding to support the nation's psychological health and address health disparities. Thanks in part to this advocacy, the House included provisions to support the modernization of data collection methods and infrastructure in order to increase data collection related to health inequities. The bill also includes significant funding to the National Institutes of Health to mitigate losses to labs, universities and the scientific workforce, and over \$1 billion for new research funding. APA will continue to advocate for these and other priorities. The Senate has not committed to quickly passing another COVID-19 stimulus package. [APA's FY 2020 Appropriations Request](#) for a Phase IV relief package includes recommendations to:

- Strengthen support for mental and behavioral health services
- Prioritize funding that promotes health equity
- Support COVID-related behavioral and social science research

- Support victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault
- Expand efforts to prevent and respond to child trauma
- Increase support to states for K-12 and higher education
- Bolster the social safety net for low- and middle-income households and workers
- Make additional investments in broadband access for telemedicine and distance learning

For more information, contact Alexandra Ginsberg, MPH, at aginsberg@apa.org.

Ensuring Telehealth Coverage in ERISA Health Plans During COVID-19 Emergency

APA collaborated with the American Psychiatric Association in leading the Mental Health Liaison Group's [support](#) of bipartisan telehealth legislation sponsored by Rep. Kim Schrier (D-Wash.) and Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.). The Health Care at Home Act ([H.R. 6644](#)) requires group health plans and insurers to cover telehealth services, including mental health and substance use disorder services, during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The legislation also requires telehealth services to be reimbursed at the same rate as in-person services. This legislation would have a tremendous impact on the ability of Americans who are enrolled in self-insured ERISA plans (approximately 60% of covered workers) to receive telehealth services.

For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at lstine@apa.org.

Advocating for Psychology Students and Borrowers Impacted by COVID-19

APA has endorsed several bills that would provide further support for psychology students and borrowers in the workforce, many of whom are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing mental and behavioral health care. They are:

- The Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act ([H.R. 6720](#)), which would forgive the student loan debt of frontline health workers, including psychologists, for all federal and private student loans and ensure that any canceled debt is not considered taxable income. Both paid and volunteer workers, including current trainees, who served for any period during a qualifying emergency, would be eligible. APA sent an [action alert](#) last week asking psychologists to urge their congressional representatives to support the legislation and include it as part of an upcoming COVID-related relief package. More than 3,000 members of the [Psychology Advocacy Network](#) answered the call to action, contacting over 400 members of Congress with six signing on as cosponsors, bringing the current total to 18.
- The Opportunities for Heroes Act (H.R. 6699), which would provide up to \$25,000 in either student loan debt relief or education benefits to essential workers—including mental health care providers—and their family members. Borrowers with all types of federal loans and private loans would be eligible, and any canceled debt would not be counted as taxable income.
- The Equity in Student Loan Relief Act (H.R. 6597), which extends the CARES Act (H.R. 748) student loan provisions—suspension of loan payments and interest accrual for all direct federal student loans through Sept. 30—to borrowers with commercially held Federal Family Education Loans. APA also endorsed additional legislation, soon to be introduced, that expands these same provisions to Perkins loan borrowers. These bills, which were also included in the House-passed HEROES Act (H.R. 6800), provide these benefits to an additional 10 million borrowers with federal student loans, including psychologists.

For more information, contact Kenneth Polishchuk at kpolishchuk@apa.org.

Requesting More Support for Students and Educators

APA [joined](#) over 70 other organizations in calling on Congress to provide more than \$250 billion in emergency education stabilization funds to states as part of upcoming COVID-19 stimulus legislation. Specifically, APA is requesting at least \$175 billion directly for local education agencies; \$50 billion for higher education; and \$25 billion for programs serving historically marginalized students including Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The letter also urges lawmakers to provide \$4 billion to increase the availability of broadband for virtual learning purposes; expand access to counseling and psychologists for both students and educators; support programs that would mitigate lost

learning time; and provide more funding for school nutrition and food assistance programs.

APA also signed a [letter](#) to the co-chairs of the National Governors Association's Education and Workforce Committee that asks governors to prioritize social and emotional learning as part of federal and state emergency funding for K-12 education in response to COVID-19. It offers a set of recommendations on how states can implement the \$3 billion for the Governors Emergency Education Relief Fund appropriated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748).

For more information, contact Kenneth Polishchuk at kpolishchuk@apa.org.

Calling for a Permanent Legislative Fix for DACA Recipients

APA signed a [letter](#) with 76 other organizations representing health professions that urges Congress and the administration to maintain work authorization for those currently in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program during the COVID-19 national emergency. The letter also highlights the contributions of DACA recipients to the health-care workforce. The letter calls on the administration to retain the program and asks Congress to include a permanent legislative solution in the next COVID-19 bill.

For more information, contact Kenneth Polishchuk at kpolishchuk@apa.org or Serena Davila at sdavila@apa.org.

Improving Access to Mental Health Screening and Assessment for Youth in Foster Care

On May 7, Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) [introduced](#) the Timely Mental Health for Foster Youth Act with bipartisan support. If enacted, the bill would mandate mental health screenings for all children and youth within 30 days of their entering the foster care system and a follow up assessment, when necessary, within 60 days. APA worked with Sen. Blunt's office to strengthen the bill by including pediatric mental health professionals in the development of technical assistance to state child welfare agencies and by adding sensible reporting requirements to monitor implementation. These changes will help to ensure that screenings and assessments are delivered quickly and are evidence-based, trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate. The data and reporting elements will provide a new national picture of mental health services and access for children and youth within the child welfare system.

For more information, contact Cynthia Whitney at cmalley@apa.org.

Condemning Discrimination Against Asian Americans

APA worked with the American Society of Human Genetics and other scientific societies to write a [letter](#) condemning anti-Asian discrimination associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and endorsing both [House](#) and [Senate](#) resolutions targeting discrimination. [Rep. Grace Meng](#) (D-N.Y.) led the effort in the House of Representatives and [Sen. Kamala Harris](#) (D-Calif.) introduced the companion resolution in the Senate. [Press reports](#) were informed by a [statement](#) from the Asian American Psychological Association about anti-Asian stigma as well as by APA's [press release](#) about destigmatizing COVID-19. Prior to introducing the resolution, Sen. Harris and her colleagues [wrote](#) to the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division requesting the division to release a plan to address coronavirus-related hate crimes and discrimination, designate an official to coordinate an interagency response and a review of the incidents, and provide monthly updates to Congress. Earlier this month, President Trump proclaimed May 2020 as [Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#).

For more information, contact Geoff Mumford, PhD, at gmumford@apa.org.

Advocating for Collection of Disability Status Data in Mandated COVID-19 Reporting

In a [letter](#) to Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, APA and the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition called on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to collect and report data on demographic characteristics that is de-identified and disaggregated by disability status in order to better inform the COVID-19 pandemic response. The letter warned that people with disabilities will remain at greater risk of disease and death without the collection of data disaggregated by disability status associated with COVID-19. The letter follows previous collaborations between APA's Advocacy team and [Div. 22](#) (Rehabilitation Psychology) and [Div. 33](#) (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities / Autism Spectrum Disorder) to advocate for the needs of persons with disabilities during the coronavirus pandemic.

For more information, contact Ben Vonachen, at bvonachen@apa.org.

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