



# APA ADVOCACY *Washington Update*

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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.*

## Write Your Senators: Boost Funding to Reimburse COVID-Related Losses to Researchers



APA has sent a [call for action](#) asking psychologists to contact their senators in support of emergency funds to reimburse losses from research suspensions and lab closures. The House-passed supplemental relief bill, [H.R. 6800](#), includes \$4.75 billion in funding for pandemic-related research and costs at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and \$125 million for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which would be welcome relief for scientists and their sponsoring institutions. Yet the nationwide costs involved in suspending so many active federal research grants this spring exceed that amount. APA supports the systematic approach endorsed by the Association of American Universities and partner academic organizations that would set aside \$26 billion to allow scientists funded by NIH, NSF and other federal research agencies to recover lost funds for research and personnel.

For more information, contact Pat Kobor at [pkobor@apa.org](mailto:pkobor@apa.org).

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### Advocating for Extended Telehealth Flexibility

APA has continued its push to extend coverage for telehealth and audio-only services in Medicare once the COVID-19 emergency period officially ends. APA has also joined

with other mental health organizations and members of Congress in urging a 12-month extension of telehealth coverage of psychological services to continue providing flexibility to patients, and to give the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and Congress time to collect and evaluate data. Members of the Psychology Advocacy Network weighed in, sending more than 9,000 messages to Capitol Hill asking Congress to extend audio-only telehealth services coverage in Medicare. If you haven't already done so, take the time to [tell your members of Congress](#) to extend these lifesaving services.

*For more information, contact Bryant Robinson at [brobinson@apa.org](mailto:brobinson@apa.org).*

### **Submitting Congressional Testimony on Police Reforms**

On June 10, Rep. [Joe Neguse](#) (D-Colo.) submitted APA's [testimony](#) for the record for a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee titled [Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability](#). In the testimony, APA's CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, voiced support for measures aimed at decreasing racial bias in policing and the criminal justice system. Specifically, he urged a ban on police tactics involving chokeholds and strangleholds and encouraged the inclusion of psychologists on multidisciplinary teams to implement police reforms and partnerships between mental health organizations and local law enforcement. His testimony also cited psychological research on implicit bias, policing and restorative justice. APA Member [Phillip Abita Goff, PhD](#), also testified in his current capacity as CEO and founder of the [Center for Policing Equity](#). APA's testimony was also shared with the White House Domestic Policy Council. To find out more about APA's testimony, see our [press release](#) or watch the full hearing [here](#).

*For more information, contact Ben Vonachen at [bvonachen@apa.org](mailto:bvonachen@apa.org) or Alix Ginsberg at [aginsberg@apa.org](mailto:aginsberg@apa.org).*

### **Improving the Federal COVID-19 Response in Communities of Color**

APA submitted written [testimony](#) to the House Ways and Means Committee for its hearing on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, held on May 27. APA's testimony explained how psychological science can be used to mitigate the pandemic's disparate impact on racial and ethnic minorities. During the hearing, expert witnesses discussed key data points and shared perspectives on improving COVID-19-related health outcomes among racial and ethnic minorities. APA urged the committee to consider underlying social determinants of health and recommended targeting resources to mental health services in communities of color, bolstering safety net programs, and enhancing federal, state and local data collection.

*For more information, contact Leo Rennie, MPA, at [lrennie@apa.org](mailto:lrennie@apa.org).*

### **Preserving Federal Non-Discrimination in Health-Care Protections**

APA is extremely concerned about a new rule by the Department of Health and Human Services that dismantles civil rights protections in health care for vulnerable populations, particularly transgender and gender non-conforming persons. The department's action rolls back critical anti-discrimination protections codified in 2016 regulations. The new rule narrows the number of entities covered by the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) non-discrimination protections, thereby opening the door to discrimination by some insurers and providers. The new rule eviscerates the current regulation's definition of sex discrimination, which includes sexual orientation, gender expression and pregnancy termination. This change makes discrimination against sexual and gender minorities permissible, as well as discrimination against women based on their pregnancy termination decisions. The validity of provisions pertaining to sex discrimination in the final Section 1557 rule may also be in question because they may conflict with the [June 15 Supreme Court decision in \*Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia\*](#) that protects gay, lesbian and transgender employees from being disciplined, fired or turned down for a job based on their sexual orientation.

APA supported strong non-discrimination protections in the ACA; advocated for strong regulatory enforcement of Section 1557 of the ACA; and opposed recent efforts to roll back the 2016 Final Rule. For example, APA joined other organizations calling for the rule-making process to be suspended due to the current public health emergency. In collaboration with APA [Div. 44](#) (Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity) Public Policy Committee co-chairs, APA also organized a meeting with the federal Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs within the Office of Management and Budget on May 21 to express APA's opposition to the rule. APA recommends including strong non-discriminatory language in all COVID-19

supplemental funding packages Congress enacts, and in Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations bills as well.

*For more information, contact Leo Rennie, MPA, at [lrennie@apa.org](mailto:lrennie@apa.org).*

### **Supporting Mental Health Block Grant-Funded Crisis Care Services**

APA joined leading national organizations in supporting the Crisis Care Improvement and Suicide Prevention Act of 2020 (H.R. 7159), introduced by Reps. [Cheri Bustos](#) (D-Ill.) and Susan Wild (D-Pa.). The bill directs states to use 5% of their Community Mental Health Services Block Grant—once funding for the program is increased by 5% nationally—for crisis care services, including 24/7 mobile crisis teams, crisis call centers and crisis stabilization programs. APA CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, commended the bill sponsors for "stimulating greater community-based investments in the provision of comprehensive crisis care services" and stressed that "it is time to provide greater attention to the needs of individuals experiencing psychological distress."

The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant program is administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and serves children and adults with severe mental health disorders.

*For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org).*

### **Calling for Extension of Telehealth Services' Expansion**

APA's advocacy and practice staff wrote a letter to all state [governors](#) and [insurance commissioners](#), in partnership with the American Psychiatric Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Association of Social Workers and Mental Health America, calling on states to extend their temporary emergency waivers on telehealth for at least a year after the national public health emergency ends. In the letter, the CEOs of the five leading national mental health provider and patient organizations urged the states to "follow the actions taken by CMS reimbursing for services provided by audio-only services and mandate that Medicaid and commercial health plans reimburse for audio-only services for routine traditional mental and behavioral health services."

Advocacy and practice staff continue to work together at both the federal and state level to advance telepsychological services for psychologists and their patients.

*For more information, contact Laurel Stine, JD, at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org) and Stephen Gillaspay, PhD, at [sgillaspay@apa.org](mailto:sgillaspay@apa.org).*

### **APA Member Appointed to New Commission on Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes**

APA advocated for the inclusion of a psychologist on the new Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [Commission on Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes](#). CMS appointed psychologist Lisa Brown, PhD, a professor and director of the trauma program at Palo Alto University who has been providing online training for the Institute for Health Care Improvement for hundreds of nursing homes in response to pandemic trauma. She and other members of the commission will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic within nursing homes and will make recommendations that will inform efforts to safeguard the health and quality of life of vulnerable Americans as the nation continues to battle COVID-19, as well as prepare for future threats to public health and safety.

*For more information, contact Serena Davila, JD, at [sdavila@apa.org](mailto:sdavila@apa.org).*

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