

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tina Smith  
United States Senate  
720 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Murkowski and Smith:

The undersigned national organizations dedicated to strengthening Americans' access to mental health care write to extend our strong support for the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2021. This bill takes a vital step toward addressing our nation's dire shortage of mental health professionals and reducing the unmet mental health treatment gap for Americans across the lifespan, that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in the United States was alarming before the added stressors of the pandemic. In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 American adults had a mental illness<sup>1</sup> and more than 20 million had a substance use disorder.<sup>2</sup> Emerging data on the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic show disturbing trends, including an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use.<sup>3</sup> Children and adolescents are experiencing adverse mental health impacts as well, with CDC reporting an increase in the proportion of emergency room visits that are mental health related for children ages 5-17.<sup>4</sup> All of these concerns are increased among BIPOC populations, where disparities in health care, including for mental and behavioral health, existed prior to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Due in part to the shortage of mental health professionals, many children, adolescents, and adults continue to go without needed, potentially life-saving, equitable mental health care.

Untreated mental health disorders can lead to a host of adverse consequences, including homelessness, academic failure, unemployment, contact with the criminal or juvenile justice system, and suicide. Unfortunately, there are serious shortages of mental health professionals across almost all specialties. A 2016 report from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projected the supply of personnel in selected behavioral and mental health fields to be 250,000 workers short of the projected demand in 2025.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the provider shortages overall, accessing mental health care is even more difficult for the approximately 122 million Americans currently living in federally-designated mental health professional shortage areas, often in rural and tribal

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2019-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7005a3.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://bhwa.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/behavioral-health-2013-2025.pdf>

communities.<sup>7</sup>

As the need for mental health services continues to grow due to the impacts of COVID-19, it is paramount to provide equitable access to timely, appropriate, and effective treatment to help individuals with mental and behavioral health conditions obtain the services they need to thrive. We applaud your goals of building a robust mental and behavioral health workforce across professions and incentivizing mental health professionals to practice in underserved communities. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2021.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association of Suicidology  
American Counseling Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)  
Children's Hospital Association  
Clinical Social Work Association  
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice  
International OCD Foundation  
Mental Health America  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
NACBHDD and NARMH  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Counties  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>

National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Federation of Families  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Postpartum Support International  
Psychotherapy Action Network Advocacy  
REDC Consortium  
RI International, Inc.  
SMART Recovery  
The Kennedy Forum  
Trust for America's Health  
Wounded Warrior Project