



Don't let Seniors lose access to Health Care

**Please support legislation that would expand Medicare coverage to Licensed Professional Counselors
Improving access to outpatient mental health treatment will help beneficiaries,
save lives, and could save Medicare money.**

Seniors are usually able to afford counseling services through employer-sponsored plans or Medicaid but once they retire or “age out”, they lose access to care. Many Medicare beneficiaries have serious mental health challenges. The elderly experience mental disorders that are not part of normal aging including anxiety, severe cognitive impairment, and mood disorders. Unfortunately, Medicare beneficiaries don't enjoy the same access to outpatient mental health professionals as those with private health insurance: Medicare does not reimburse Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) for the quality, cost-effective treatment that they provide.

There are more than 140,000 LPCs nationwide, licensed for independent practice. Licensed Professional Counselors are Master's-degreed mental health professionals, meeting education, training, experience, examination, and ethical standards on par with those of providers already covered by Medicare. That's why we need legislation which would establish Medicare coverage of LPCs. H.R. 3032 has been introduced in the House and we expect a Senate companion in the near future.

Inadequate Access to Care

An estimated 37% of seniors display symptoms of depression in a primary care environment. As stated by the Institute of Medicine in a recent report, “[t]he burden of mental illness and substance use disorder in older adults in the United States borders on a crisis”. The report laments that there is a “conspicuous lack” of national attention to ensuring sufficient numbers of mental health service providers for the rapidly growing elderly population. Mental health conditions in older Americans are associated with a wide range of negative effects, including increased functional disability, reduced physical health, increased mortality, higher rates of suicide, and high overall treatment costs. At least 5.6 million to 8 million older adults- or about 14% to 20% of the overall elderly population have one or more mental disorders. Depressive disorders and dementia- related symptoms are the most prevalent diagnoses.

Seniors and the Opioid crises

Both the Wall Street Journal and the *Journal for Gerontological Nursing* have stated that the older adult population is the fastest growing age group for opioid misuses in the U.S. Yet, in a 2016 Surgeon General's report “*Facing Addiction in America*”, limited access to LPCs was highlighted:

“However, Medicare, and in some states Medicaid, restricts “billable” health care professionals to physicians (including psychiatrists), nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists, physician's assistants, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, and certain other specified practitioners, and does not include as billable the multiple other licensed and certified professionals who are trained to provide services for substance use disorders.” It is imperative that Seniors receive the access to the treatment that is desperately needed to combat this crises.

***Please support legislation that would authorize Medicare
reimbursement for counseling services!***

Comparable Training

Medicare covers mental health services when provided by psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health clinical nurse specialists, and clinical social workers. LPCs and Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are not covered, despite the fact that both groups have education, training, and practice rights equivalent to or greater than existing covered providers. Both LPCs and MFTs are licensed for independent practice in all 50 states, and are covered by private sector health plans.

	Licensed Mental Health Counselor	Licensed Clinical Social Worker	Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
Education	Possesses a master's or doctoral degree in mental health counseling or a related field	Possesses a master's or doctoral degree in social work	Possesses a master's or doctoral degree which qualifies for licensure as a marriage and family therapist pursuant to State law
Experience	Two years of post-graduate supervised mental health counselor practice	Two years of post-graduate supervised clinical social work experience	Two years of post-graduate clinical supervised experience in marriage and family therapy
Licensure Requirement	Licensed or certified as a mental health counselor within the State of practice	Licensed or certified to practice as a clinical social worker by the State in which the services are performed	Licensed or certified as a marriage and family therapist within the State of practice
# of State-licensed providers	~120,000	~200,000	~55,000
Covered by Medicare?	No	Yes	No