



November 21, 2023

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Finance
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo,

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), we write to express our strong support for the Better Mental Health Care, Lower Drug Cost, and Extenders Act. This important legislation will improve access to clinical social worker services in Medicare amongst many additional policy changes ensuring access to high quality mental and behavioral health care.

Founded in 1955, NASW is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the United States, representing more than 110,000 social workers. We work to enhance the professional growth and development of our members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.

NASW has long advocated for advancement of the Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 838), led by Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and John Barrasso (R-WY). NASW appreciates the Committee's recognition of this legislation's merits by including two of three provisions of the bill in the Better Mental Health Care, Lower Drug Cost, and Extenders Act. These provisions include allowing clinical social workers (CSWs) to provide mental health services to Medicare beneficiaries in skilled nursing facilities and allowing CSWs to be reimbursed for Health Behavior Assessment and Intervention services.

Further, we are most appreciative of Senator Debbie Stabenow's amendment, which was offered and withdrawn, to increase reimbursement for CSWs from 75% of the Medicare physician fee schedule to 85%. The CSW reimbursement rate has not been reevaluated since 1989 when CSWs became Medicare providers. The rate is considerably lower than the 85% rate at which most non-physician practitioners are reimbursed. Mitigating this reimbursement disparity by increasing the CSW reimbursement rate to 85% of the physician fee schedule will increase the recruitment and retention of CSWs in the Medicare workforce, thereby expanding provider options for beneficiaries. Alignment of CSW reimbursement with that of most other non-physician providers is an important provision of the Improving Access to Mental Health Act and we are hopeful that the Senate Finance Committee will support obtaining a CBO score for this provision and work with Senators Stabenow and Barrasso to chart a path forward for this important policy change.

Thank you for your leadership in developing the meaningful policies contained in the Better Mental Health Care, Lower Drug Cost, and Extenders Act. NASW looks forward to working with you to support advancement and enactment of this transformative legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Estreet', with a stylized, flowing script.

Anthony Estreet, PhD, MBA, LCSW-C
Chief Executive Officer, NASW