July 10, 2020

The Honorable Eric D. Hargan
Deputy Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert Humphrey Bldg.
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

RE: Specific Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care Provider Fund Distribution

Dear Deputy Secretary Hargan:

The undersigned mental health and substance use provider and patient advocacy organizations are writing to express our sincere thanks for your unambiguous commitment, during our July 7, 2020 call, to issue an additional distribution from the Health Care Provider Fund — authorized in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act — that would be available to behavioral health providers.

We appreciate the opportunity last week to voice the unique needs of behavioral health providers in terms of lost revenues, closures of programs and services, and lay-offs/furloughs as well as the confusion surrounding the various provider portals and associated Provider Relief Fund distributions. Simply put, providers were unsure when to apply to which targeted distribution. Given that Medicare represents only 5-7% of annual revenue for behavioral health providers, many providers believed that their financial viability was better served should they wait for the Medicaid and CHIP distribution. They proceeded in what was believed to be the best interest of their practices, unaware that they would be prohibited from receiving funds from the Medicaid and CHIP targeted distribution.

Your clarification that the intention of the previously released Provider Relief Fund distributions – to “true-up” both Medicare and Medicaid providers – came as significant and timely relief for healthcare providers facing overwhelming financial pressures. Your acknowledgement and understanding that the behavioral health needs in our nation will continue and indication that there will be a future “tranche” of monies dedicated to providers based on revenue lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that all healthcare providers have the ability to access 2% of gross receipts from patient care as a source of relief was critical. Further, your assertion that organizations who were unable to receive the full 2% from previous distributions would have preference in the next distribution of funding for healthcare providers is a vital remedy for behavioral health organizations and/or individual providers who experienced issues and confusion in engaging the portals and accessing needed relief funds.
Thank you again for taking the time to consider the unique needs of the behavioral health community and for providing sincere and thoughtful solutions that will allow providers to continue to meet the increasing demand for mental health and substance use disorder treatment throughout the nation. We look forward to learning more details surrounding the timeframe and rollout of additional Provider Relief Fund distributions targeted towards healthcare providers and welcome a continued dialogue with the Department for Health and Human Services.

Your leadership and partnership are truly invaluable, and we cannot thank you enough for your understanding and support.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Clubhouse International
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Family Focused Treatment Association
FREDLA
Health in Justice Action Lab
International Bipolar Foundation

Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Council for Behavioral Health Shatterproof
Steinberg Institute
The Kennedy Forum
Treatment Advocacy Center
Vibrant Emotional Health
Well Being Trust

CC: Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use