

Mental Health Clinic Funding Will End Friday Unless Its Extended

By Chelsea Cirruzzo September 12, 2019 at 5:12 PM – The Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic demonstration program will lose its funding on Friday (Sept. 13) if the Senate does not act to pass another extension, and, despite reassurances by senators that funding is a priority, nothing appears to be moving forward ahead of that deadline.

The program, which gives clinics providing mental health care and substance use disorder services in participating states enhanced Medicaid reimbursement, has been repeatedly funded through short-term extensions this year.

The House approved a longer-term extension that would fund the program through Dec. 31, 2021. However, the Senate has not picked up the long-term extension bill.

Just before August recess on July 30, Congress passed its most recent short-term extension for the program through Sept. 13. House Energy & Commerce Chair Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and ranking Republican Greg Walden (OR) called on the Senate then to take up the longer-term extension that passed the House in June.

A spokesperson for the E&C GOP Wednesday said Walden and Pallone continue to pressure the Senate to extend the program and pointed back to a joint statement from the leaders in July. "We cannot afford to keep kicking the can down the road in the midst of an [opioid] epidemic," they said at the time.

"That sentiment hasn't changed and we continue to urge the Senate to pass the needed long-term extension," the spokesperson told Inside Health Policy.

Sens. Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced a bill earlier this year to fund the program for an additional two years as well as expand the number of participating states to 19.

A spokesperson for Blunt's office said getting the program extended remains a priority and Blunt is working on finding a path forward. The office had no further updates.

The National Council for Behavioral Health has repeatedly called for a long-term program extension. Chuck Ingoglia, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health, told Inside Health Policy the group has been working closely with Stabenow and Blunt on securing the funding and expanding the program to new states.

"Failure by Congress to extend this program and allow a second funding lapse this year would be a tragedy. The nation is in the midst of an opioid and mental health crisis. The bright spots in our nation's treatment infrastructure are those communities that are lucky enough to have a CCBHC. Without Congressional action, upwards of 9,000 individuals will lose access to medication-assisted treatment and 3,000 staff providing addiction and mental health services risk being laid off," Ingoglia said.