National Council for Behavioral Health

Association Executives Teleconference Summary Notes

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

1:30 – 2:30 p.m. ET

Participants:

Laura Aldinger, Jeremy Blair, Melanie Brown-Woofter, Nadia Chait, Le Ondra Clark-Harvey, John Coppola, Paul Curtis, Paul Demple, Terry Dosch, Lori Doyle, Mark Drennan, Annette Dubas, Mark Fontaine, Doyle Forrestal, Mandy Gilman, Linda Grant, Lauren Grimes, Shannon Hall, Lisa Henick, Kimberley Higgs, Cynthia Humphrey, Heather Jefferis, Julia Jernigan, Lee Johnson, Teresa Lampl, Mark Levota, Marvin Lindsey, Scott Lutgenau, John Magnuson, Brent McGinty, Carolyn Petrak, Michelle Ponce, Sara Potter, Cherryl Ramirez, Mary-Linden Salter, Flora Schmidt, Malory Shaughnessy, Adrienne Shelton, Andrea Smyth, Christine Stoner-Mertz, Andrea Summerville, Julie Tessler, John Tessoni, Debra Wentz, Tara Weaver, Ellyn Wilber, and Mary Windecker.

Staff in Attendance:

Chuck Ingoglia, Jeannie Campbell, Neal Comstock, Frankie Berger, Reyna Taylor, Joe Parks, Diane Mallard, Becca Farley-David, Brett Beckerson, Michael Petruzelli, Sarah Surgenor, Sophia Majaleesi, Sam Holcombe

Guests:

**Summary Notes:**

**COVID-19 Policy Update**

Presented by Reyna Taylor and Frankie Berger –

Reyna Taylor discussed federal legislative and regulatory updates including the allocation of stimulus funds and advocacy for the next (4th) phase of stimulus legislation. Reyna also discussed the $100 billion public health and social services fund passed as part of the CARES Act. She stated that CMS is distributing $30 billion of this to Medicare providers based on Medicare and Fee for Service revenue in 2018. Reyna said that the National Council is advocating for funding for Medicaid providers and is working with House leadership to address the need for additional funding for behavioral health providers.

Reyna also discussed a call with the White House later in the day in which we plan on raising the financial challenges behavioral care providers are facing. She stated the House and Senate will not be coming back to DC before May 4th and that Congress will not resume normal office activities until then.

She also stated that Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will be reviewing the Payroll Protection Program. It is expected to run out of funding this week. Reyna discussed how House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) asked for half of that to go to non-traditional borrowers—female lead, minority owned, etc. $100 billion has been earmarked for hospitals with another $150 billion for state and local governments. There is also a proposal for a 15% increase in SNAP benefits.

Reyna also discussed the upcoming 4th package of stimulus legislation. Currently, plans are to infuse money into existing lines of funding authority, with no policy tweaks or proposals to add new programs. She stated that the National Council is heavily involved in these conversations, especially regarding our $38 billion request for behavioral health providers.

Discussion (Discussion threads grouped by topic. Not all discussions captured) -

Mark Fontaine (FL) asked about SAMHSA officials stating that they is no flexibility regarding how the funding is provided. He asked if there is flexibility available, in particular on block grants. Chuck said he will reach out to SAMHSA about that and that NASADAD sent in request for flexibility in with block grants. Mark asked why we cannot get more money to states to distribute by block grants. Chuck stated the $2 million has gone to states and we have requested and additional $250 million to go to directly to provider organizations. Mark requested that Reyna send 2-3 sentences of legislative talking points. Reyna agreed to do so.

John Magnuson (MN) asked about the substance use disorder portion of funds. His asked if they are only for national accredited providers. Chuck stated there are 3 categories of eligibility, including any organization deemed eligible by the Secretary. Currently, the National Council is stating that organizations that deal with mental health or behavioral health should be eligible for funds, however it looks like it might not work that way. Chuck stated that we believe that any organization that treats addiction should be eligible for funds.

Catherine Finley shared that funding for our providers is at risk because the Federal government doesn’t have access to data that tells them the breadth of need. She stated most of this data only exists at state level.

Doyle Forrestal (CO) asked if we have received guidance from SAMHSA on which behavioral health providers have been deemed essential. Catherine replied that the federal government does not designate essential and non-essential business but that it is up to the states to do so.

Laura Aldinger (SC) asked if organizations can get retainer funding from states. Catherine stated that CMS does not agree that they have authority to allow states to make retainer payments. However, they are looking at reexamining the possibility of doing Medicaid payments with retainers. Chuck stated the National Council has sent a letter to the National Association of State Medicaid Directors (NASMD) asking them to make retainer payments to providers. He also inquired if Association Executives think any of their states have good framework for making retainer payments or if there is a model to get behind. Mallory Shaughnessy (ME) said she thought some states are currently working on retainer payments without doing reconciliation. Chuck said that three states have asked for authority to make retainer payments, but that none have yet been approved. Chuck said we are proposing reconciliation to happen over long period of time, not by the end of this fiscal year. He also stated that he is not sure we can propose something without reconciliation.

Christine Stoner-Mertz (CA) said that her recommendation included allowing counties to pay up to twice their interim reimbursement rate.

Heather Jefferis (OR) stated that her members are experiencing about a 50% reduction in services. Some struggles that her organizations are facing include having to train everyone to do telehealth, and the need to train staff to use different billing codes.

Paul Curtis (CA) suggested that a work group might be a good idea with states that have district programs, or states that have used grants for provider networks. He wondered if maybe there are ways funds can be distributed to networks that can allocate to larger audience. Frankie said would like to create a short-term task force to help inform recommendations for CMS. This would need to be done ASAP by end of week and asked for volunteers to contact her.

Mark said 12 states have not done Medicaid expansion, so they have a population that will not get served unless they can figure out how to do that without block grants.

**COVID-19 Clinical Support for Behavioral Health Providers**

Presented by Dr. Joe Parks

Joe Parks gave an update on what National Council staff has been doing. He said there are several calls a week on specialty topic areas including self-care, telehealth, finance and operations, peer support and residential treatment—all this in addition to weekly Medical Directors’ Institute call. He stated that the overall attendance is very high and callers are very engaged. The number of people participating now is much higher than most of the technical assistance or training webinars of the past. He also stated that large portions of the callers find it very useful and will use information in their day to day work. They are also developing short training videos related to PPE (how to put it on, take it off, etc.) in addition to other topics such as self-care. They are also producing wallet cards on certain topics for quick reference.

**Open Discussion**

Chuck asked if, as states switch to telephonic services, are there still problems with FCC Lifeline program phones? Lauren Grimes (MD) said that the FCC now lists carriers that have expanded minutes. Chuck said he will clarify with the FCC. Paul requested a chart that has all 50 states with list of vendors that have expanded minutes.

Michelle Ponce (KS) asked about getting a timeline that estimate the shipping of masks ordered. Jeannie Campbell said we are hoping to get a confirmation of shipment shortly.

**Next Association Executives Teleconference**

April 21, 2020 1:30 PM ET

Issues to be covered next week include:

* Self-insured organizations providing unemployment benefits.
* Emergency funding for non-profit providers with over 500 employees.
* How do we hold on to recent positive telehealth changes?