

Representative Helt
OR House District 54
900 Court St. NE,
H-371, Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Representative Helt,

We are the Board of AMHA-OR, an Oregon not-for profit mutual benefit corporation with psychologist, social work counselor and LMFT members who provide counseling, psychotherapy and behavioral health services to patients with both OHP and commercial insurance. AMHA-OR has been in existence since 1996, and has provided training to mental health professionals as well as consumer education to the public.

1. Right now, providers are required by their contracts to collect insurance co-pays. This creates a barrier to services for people who are unemployed or worried about finances. The economic and social impact of depression and anxiety will increase over the next year. Left untreated, patients will go to emergency departments, primary care and walk in clinics seeking relief from medical and emotional stress. This need will flood physician office and hospitals.

Solution: Providers should be given permission to waive patient co-pays for commercial plans if their patients have financial hardship. Also, anyone wishing to see a counselor, social worker or psychologist should be allowed to have OHP billed if the patient's mental health needs are urgent. Some OHP behavioral health plan panels are closed. Those should be open to any willing and qualified provider.

2. Mental health professionals must complete and submit continuing education training every two years. Many can't get the training they want or need because relevant trainings are being canceled.

Solution: We recommend the Governor waive licensing fines for providers who cannot attend trainings that are closed because of social distancing requirements. We also recommend that licenses not be revoked or sanctioned for failure to complete required numbers of training hours by deadlines in 2020.

3. Developing training for mental health professionals can be a lengthy administrative process. Training is often provided to large groups by experts who will not be traveling to Oregon. Now, each community has unique reaction to the pandemic. Unique local needs require local response; perhaps offering training in small provider groups. There are no training standards relevant to pandemics issues relevant to mental health providers. We cannot bring in experts from all over the country or Oregon to provide training. We must take local responsibility since government can't do that for us. Any willing and qualified group of professionals should be allowed to provide training provided the training is properly documented and training records are maintained. We can't delay training private practice mental health practitioners in matters related to this pandemic as it is related to public health & safety

Solution: Request that the governor direct the counseling, social work and psychologist's licensing boards to allow mental health professionals to define and provide qualified training that they believe is relevant to public health and safety. Waive requirements of traditional continuing education training and allow professionals and associations to develop community and special needs training relevant to immediate public health crises. Waive requirements that training be sponsored by traditional continuing education companies and programs.

Sincerely,

Laurie Crandell, LPC - President
Michaele Dunlap, PsyD -Secretary
Tracy Heart LPC - Treasurer
Annette Rankin, LMFT - Director

Bethany Franklin-Comb, PhD - Director
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