

**Statement for the Record
Submitted to the Subcommittee on Health Care
of the Senate Finance Committee
Hearing on “Ensuring Medicare Beneficiary Access: A Path to
Telehealth Permanency”
November 14, 2023**

On behalf of the American Council on Education and the higher education associations listed below, which represent approximately 4,300 public and private nonprofit colleges and universities, we thank you for the opportunity to share our views on telehealth in the higher education context as part of the record of the Subcommittee on Health Care hearing on November 14, 2023. This statement highlights the continuing importance and need for the interstate provision of telemental health services for students enrolled in an institution of higher education as a tool to help address the current student mental health crisis.

The mental health of college and university students continues to be an enormous challenge on campuses across the country, a problem that was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. College students are reporting mental health challenges at a growing and alarming rate.¹ Nearly half of students have screened positive for depression, a significant jump from recent years and a level that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities.² Many traditional college-aged students arrive on campus already struggling with mental health challenges. A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report found that more than 44 percent of high school students reported that they struggle with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.³

While mental health concerns are impacting communities across the country,^{4,5} college students face a unique set of obstacles and challenges that can exacerbate their struggles. In addition to affecting their well-being, the rise in mental health issues among college students is impacting their success and completion. According to a recent national survey,⁶ over half of current college students (55 percent) who have considered leaving college, often referred to as “stopping out,” cite emotional stress as the primary driver. The same report also found students of color and students seeking associate degrees are disproportionately considering stopping out. In addition, nearly three in five

¹ <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/What-Works-Mental-Health.pdf>

² https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HMS_national_print-6-1.pdf;

https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HMS_national.pdf;

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032722002774?via%3Dihub>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/su/pdfs/su7103a1-a5-H.pdf>, pp. 16, 19.

⁴ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/468986/state-of-higher-education.aspx>

students report experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness, and many more report difficulty meeting other basic needs like childcare and transportation.⁷ Basic needs insecurity is associated with higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression.⁸ Colleges and universities are diligently responding to meet the surging demand for mental health services, but many lack the resources to sufficiently do so. Over two out of five (44 percent) college students are struggling with clinically significant anxiety or depression, but less than half of these students had mental health counseling and/or therapy in the past year.⁹

To help address the college student mental health crisis and the expiration of COVID-19 era waivers, Congress should authorize the interstate provision of telehealth services for students enrolled in an institution of higher education in any U.S. jurisdiction if that healthcare provider is licensed to practice or provide such care in any one state or territory or through an interstate licensure compact.

During the pandemic, nearly every state instituted an emergency waiver to facilitate interstate care. Institutions relied on those waivers to use telehealth to continue to provide needed mental health services to students who were away from campus and unable to access campus counseling services. Unfortunately, these waivers are now expired, leaving many college students without access to medically necessary behavioral health care. Telehealth access to campus mental health services remains a critical need for students seeking treatment for depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.

Many students encounter disruption in behavioral health treatment when they leave campus during breaks, participate in remote educational programs, or need to find a new behavioral healthcare provider due to licensing restrictions preventing clinicians from practicing across state lines. These can also serve as barriers to students accessing care. While state-by-state compacts represent a positive development, they do not answer this national need.

Permitting colleges and universities to provide interstate telemental health services would address a unique challenge faced by students experiencing a behavioral health crisis and may also improve retention and graduation rates among affected students. Importantly, this flexibility would also help ensure continuity of care for students who have established therapeutic relationships with campus mental health providers or with healthcare providers in their home state during the course of their education.

⁷ <https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf>

⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35124789/>

⁹ https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HMS_national_print-6-1.pdf

We thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit these comments and for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association