

# S.870 / H.R.2035 IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH ACT OF 2021

## PURPOSE

To provide Medicare patients greater access to mental health services provided by clinical social workers

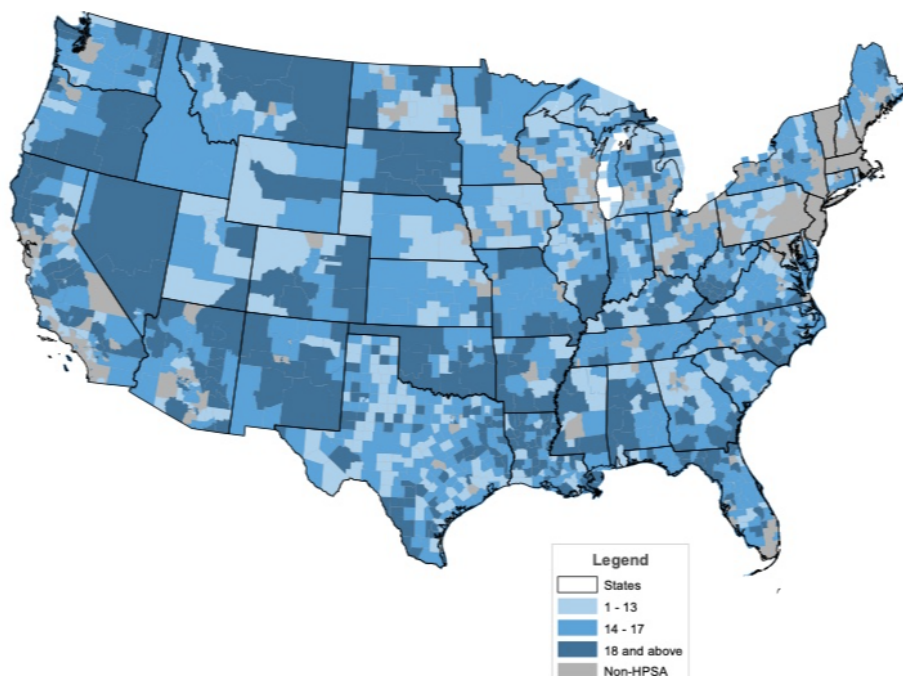
## KEY FACTS

- Medicare currently pays clinical social workers just 75% of the rate paid to psychologists and psychiatrists, while other non-physician providers such as occupational therapists receive 85% of the physician fee schedule.[7] This means many social workers cannot afford to serve Medicare patients.
- By increasing the pay rate that clinical social workers receive from Medicare, more social workers can afford to serve Medicare patients which will allow more patients to access mental health services. This is vital because over 144 million Americans live in an area with a shortage of mental health professionals (see map). [12,13]
- Under the current law, if a Medicare patient who receives services from a clinical social worker enters a skilled nursing facility, the patient cannot continue services with that social worker.[10] This rule causes a disruption in care for patients at a time when services are needed most.

## BILL OBJECTIVES

1. Increase the reimbursement rate for clinical social workers to 85% of the physician fee schedule, making it equal with other non-physician providers.[1]
2. Amend the current Medicare rules to allow residents in skilled nursing facilities to receive services from clinical social workers not employed by the facility.[1]
3. Expand Medicare coverage for clinical social worker services from only "services performed for the diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses" to also include "services for health and behavior assessment and intervention." [2]

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) - Mental Health  
*Health Resources & Services Administration, 2022*



# AUTHORS & SUPPORTERS

- Senator Debbie Stabenow [D-MI] introduced Senate bill S.870 and Representative Barbara Lee [D-CA-13] introduced bill H.R.2035 in the House of Representatives.[2,6]
- The bill has bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress: eight Senators and 53 Representatives have cosponsored the bill as of April 10, 2022.[2,6]
- Organizations in support of the bill include National Association of Social Workers[1,7], health advocacy organization Community Catalyst[8], and the Mental Health Liaison Group, a coalition which includes the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association[9].
- No members of Congress or political organizations have publicly opposed the bill.

## STATUS

- Senator Debbie Stabenow [D-MI] and Representative Barbara Lee [D-CA-13], both social workers[3], first introduced the Improving Access to Mental Health Act in 2015 to the 114th Congress.[4,5] The act has never been voted on, so they have reintroduced the bill in every subsequent session of Congress.[4,5]
- In September 2021, legislators requested key stakeholders submit policy proposals on how to address current mental health needs.[11]
- S.870 has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee.[2]
- H.R.2035 has been referred to the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health.[6]

## FUNDING

As of April 10, 2022 the Congressional Budget Office has not released a cost estimate for this bill.

## ADVOCACY

- Call or email your Senators and Representative and urge them to co-sponsor S.870/H.R.2035
- Write a letter to the editor at a local or national newspaper or post on social media, explaining the need for the Improving Access to Mental Health Act

## REFERENCES

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- [12] Health Resources & Services Administration. (n.d.). *Shortage areas*. Retrieved March 8, 2022 from <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>
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