



March 30, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro  
Chair  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
2413 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
2207 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeLauro and Representative Cole:

On behalf of the over 5,000 Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) across the country, the National Association of Rural Health Clinics (NARHC) strongly supports the inclusion of the Rural Health Clinic Behavioral Health Initiative in President Biden's proposed FY 2023 budget.

For more than 40 years, RHCs have been providing essential care to residents of rural medically underserved communities. RHCs, along with rural hospitals and Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs), provide an indispensable safety net of care to this population. In their efforts to truly meet the needs of their communities, RHCs strive to offer both medical and behavioral health services. A myriad of factors, including workforce limitations and reimbursement challenges, limit RHCs ability to employ designated behavioral health professionals.

NARHC is grateful for the prominent role that expanding access to behavioral health services plays in President Biden's budget and specifically the provisions that address RHCs. The budget includes \$10 million for a new RHC Behavioral Health Initiative, which will allow clinics without behavioral health providers to fund salaries and expand available services within their communities. If approved by Congress, this would be the first federal grant program specifically for federally certified Rural Health Clinics.

In conjunction with this, President Biden also recommended that Congress recognize Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) as mental health professionals in both fee-for-service Medicare as well as in the RHC setting. Together, these components increase the pool of mental health providers that can provide crucial care within RHCs, while providing financial tools to recruit and retain these providers.

Recently, the 2022 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule further increased access to behavioral health services for RHC patients by permanently extending Medicare telehealth coverage for mental health services provided by RHCs.

All of these components – working together – will allow RHCs to provide this essential care to their communities. NARHC encourages you to support the RHC Behavioral Health Initiative.

Please contact us if you would like to further discuss this provision of the proposed HHS budget or if you have any questions about Rural Health Clinics.

Sincerely,

*Nathan Baugh*

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