The Massachusetts Psychological Association is dedicated to improving the lives of all people in the Commonwealth through advancing psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare. In the 2021 – 2022 legislative session, MPA will continue to focus on: improving access to care by increasing provision of services and expanding access for MassHealth members; improving quality and continuity of care by addressing gaps in coverage and allowing clinicians to determine medical necessity; and, maintaining consumer and professional protections by preserving current standards for service providers, and clarifying which health plan protections citizens are entitled to.

**Access to Care:**

Although the Mental Health Parity Act was signed into law in 1996, we continue to address the many areas where implementation of parity has not been achieved. MPA will work to improve access to behavioral health and substance use services by insuring that parity is implemented and members of the Commonwealth have access to a full range of assessment and treatment services. MPA will also work towards greater timely access to services for all members of the Commonwealth, including, but not limited to, those who are: economically disadvantaged; members of cultural, ethnic or racial minority groups; members of the LGBTQ+ community; and people who have disabilities.

**Quality and Continuity of Care:**

Continuity of mental health care is critical in achieving high quality care and improved patient outcomes, and MPA will support legislation that promotes more effective, efficient, and comprehensive care in all treatment settings. This effort will include legislation that addresses unfair business practices by health plans, such as disrupting patient care by requiring patients to switch providers after summarily canceling contracts with current providers.

**Consumer and Professional Protections:**

It is of utmost importance that members of the Commonwealth receive mental health care by well-trained and skilled professionals. MPA will continue to oppose legislation that attempts to broaden the category of mental health service providers to allow licensed or unlicensed practice by individuals without sufficient education and training.

Massachusetts citizens also have the right to know whether their employer-sponsored health plan is being regulated by Massachusetts or by more lenient Federal regulations; however, this information can be very difficult to obtain. MPA supports legislation to require that health plan identification cards clearly indicate which regulations the plan must follow to better allow consumers to identify their rights and the health plans’ responsibilities. Finally, MPA will work to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations that protect consumers and ensure access to the most appropriate psychological services.
MPA’s Top 3 Priorities for this Legislative Session

1. **Mental Health Parity Legislation**
   - Ensures that health plans are meeting current mental health parity requirements by targeting barriers to access not present in medical services and by strengthening regulatory oversight of health plans.

2. **Transparency of Health Plan Regulations**
   - Requiring health insurance cards to indicate whether a member’s plan is state-insured, meaning the plan is held to Massachusetts regulations, or self-funded, meaning the plan is regulated by more lenient, federal regulations. Currently, there is no standard, readily identifiable way to do this for either consumers or providers.

3. **Increasing Access for MassHealth Clients**
   - Allows MassHealth to reimburse psychologists in independent practice for psychotherapy services and appropriate supervision of clinical providers. Current regulations allow reimbursement to these providers for testing services, but prohibit it for treatment services.

Other Legislation of Interest

MPA also supports the following legislation:

- **Protection of the therapeutic relationship** by requiring health plans to continue coverage of mental health services with an “out-of-network” provider when the patient already has an ongoing treatment relationship, if the provider accepts the in-network payment rate.

- **Increased transparency** of mental health benefits by allowing state agencies to monitor health plan denial of service for behavioral health services and size of the provider network, and track number of patients who are unable to schedule an appointment with a behavioral health provider.

- **More expedient access** to care by including psychologists in the list of providers for whom nurses are authorized to follow written orders, within the current scope of practice as defined for psychologists.

- **Removing unnecessary barriers** to care by allowing licensed clinicians, in consultation with their patient, to determine medical necessity, instead of each health plan creating their own medical necessity criteria. Licensed clinicians in Massachusetts are able to do this when providing substance use/abuse services, but not for other mental health services.

MPA opposes any legislation that seeks to broaden current licensure restrictions to include providers without a sufficient level of training and education.