Quarterly Report  
Q1 2020

Introduction
Welcome to the Texas Psychological Association’s (TPA) new quarterly report. The information contained within is intended to provide a brief snapshot of the advocacy efforts conducted by TPA during each three-month period.

Outreach
During the first quarter of 2020, TPA conducted the following outreach and participated in or attended the following meetings on behalf of TPA members.

Regulatory Agencies
- Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists (TSBEP)
- Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC)
- Texas Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)
- Texas Department of Insurance (TDI)
- Governor’s Regulatory Compliance Division

Stakeholders
- Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards
- National Association of Social Workers-Texas
- Texas Counseling Association
- Texas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- NAMI Texas
- Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians
- Disability Rights Texas
- Texas Medical Association

Elected Officials’ Staff
- Gov. Greg Abbott
- Sen. John Whitmire
- Sen. Judith Zaffirini
- Rep. Donna Howard
- Rep. Giovanni Capriglione
- Rep. Vikki Goodwin
- Rep. Four Price
- Rep. Stephanie Klick

Quarterly Meetings
- The Coalition for Healthy Minds
- Texas Society of Allied Health Professionals
- Texas Family and Protective Services Council
- Behavioral Health Advisory Committee
- TSBEP
- BHEC

Regulatory Advocacy
HHS
In January, TPA submitted a letter to HHS regarding proposed rules for Outpatient
Competency Restoration programs. TPA is concerned the standards proposed do not align with the standards the legislature established for jail-based programs under the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure.

TDI
In February, TPA submitted a letter to TDI commenting on the implementation of HB 10 (85th Regular Session). The letter was a response to a survey request by TDI. TPA’s survey responses were made available to all TPA members to assist in drafting their own comments.

BHEC
BHEC is working extensively on its procedural rules, including those related to applications and licensing, renewals, discipline, fees, and general governance. At its March meeting, TPA’s Executive Director provided testimony concerning temporary suspension panels, competency panels, and fees. The Executive Director encouraged BHEC to take panels a step further to ensure that a majority of the panelists come from the applicable board. This recommendation was adopted. Fees continue to be an issue, with psychologists paying three times more than other professionals, in some cases. BHEC voted to examine this more closely in a subcommittee. In the meantime, TPA is working with BHEC’s Executive Director and the Governor’s Regulatory Compliance Division to address concerns.

COVID-19 Advocacy
COVID-19 has led to extraordinary advocacy efforts by TPA staff, consultants, and members, on behalf of all psychologists in Texas.

This update captures work exclusively conducted in the first quarter. COVID-19 advocacy work continues during the second quarter and will be captured in the next report.

Q1 advocacy efforts include:

- A letter to Governor Abbott lauding expanded access to telehealth from Texas mental health professional associations
- A letter to TDI Commissioner Sullivan calling for immediate access to telehealth
- A letter to Governor Abbott and DSHS calling for DSHS to re-establish its database of mental health professionals
- A letter to Governor Abbott calling for clarification in TDI’s emergency rulemaking regarding psychological and neuropsychological testing

Behind the scenes, TPA has:

- Had multiple exchanges with the Governor’s Office, addressing telehealth challenges and the failure of most insurance companies to extend coverage
- Repeatedly communicated to insurance companies like Blue Cross Blue Shield and Superior to provide reimbursement for telehealth
• Stayed connected with TSBEP, pushing out updates to rules governing psychology
• Worked with HHS to provide Disability Determination Services and Medicaid updates
• Coordinated with other mental health professional groups in Texas
• Updated APA on TPA state advocacy efforts and prepared federal advocacy support

TPA also increased its online presence. TPA created a dedicated COVID-19 webpage with information for practitioners and helpful mental health resources. Practitioner information includes a Toolkit for Telehealth, small business resources, and FAQs and current regulations & guidelines that are updated regularly. Information for the public includes coping with anxiety and talking with your kids. TPA members produced blog content appropriate for practitioners and the public.

Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are updated regularly, and newsletters designed for all psychologists in TPA’s database are produced at least twice a week. Every Friday a President Update is included.

TPA also began offering new member benefits. TPA hosted a webinar on Behavioral Health and Ethical Challenges as We Respond to Pandemics, presented by Rebecca Hamlin, PhD, former Disaster Response Committee Co-Chair. One hour of free PD credit was available to the first 100 registrants.

None of these efforts would be successful without extensive support and information provided by TPA’s President, the Business of Practice (BOP) Committee, Director of Professional Affairs (DPA), the Public Education Committee and many of TPA’s members.

The Pro Bono Project: COVID-19
In the midst of COVID-19 advocacy, TPA launched The Pro Bono Project: COVID-19, intended to provide up to two hours of free mental health services to under or uninsured Texans. With the help of the Disaster Resource Network: COVID-19 Committee, TPA has recruited and organized its membership of licensed psychologists to support the mental health care needs of Texans impacted by COVID-19. This support is provided by telehealth or telephone.