Introduction
Welcome to the Texas Psychological Association’s (TPA) 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.

Regulatory Advocacy
Behavioral Health Executive Council
The Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC) took effect September 1. Rules pertaining to psychologists have been largely adopted, with the outstanding issue of the current fee structure. Jessica Magee will represent TPA on BHEC’s advisory committee on fees, but no meetings have been scheduled yet.

Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists
Now that BHEC is live, a new executive director for the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists (TSBEP) has been announced: Diane Moore. Ms. Moore moved to Texas from Ohio, where she previously worked for another regulatory agency.

Related to advocacy during Q3, TPA submitted comments to TSBEP regarding Rule 465.2, which allowed remote or electronic supervision so long as certain conditions were met. The proposed rule would have removed those conditions, and then added a requirement that the remote or electronic supervision be synchronous. We were concerned the proposed language would both unintentionally prohibit asynchronous communications and create a potential for abuse by allowing an audio-only supervisory relationship.

TSBEP accepted our recommendation. TSBEP ultimately decided to adopt the rule as-is to keep the rulemaking process moving, but will propose our language at the November meeting to replace what they adopted. BHEC Executive Director Darrel Spinks took a few minutes at the meeting to applaud the well-reasoned letter. Credit here goes to Kevin Stewart and the BHEC/TSBEP Committee (Drs. Carol Grothues and Bret Moore, Co-Chairs; Fran Douglas; David Hill; Elisabeth Middleton, Dan Roberts, and Corrine Zupanick).

TPA has also been working with TSBEP to request from ASPPB Texas-specific information regarding gender, race, ethnicity, and degree type; EPPP total score; and each EPPP content domain score. ASPPB initially declined. ASPPB has subsequently informed TPA they do not capture that information but will look into it and report back. TPA is requesting this information to examine the potentially regressive practices in the EPPP-2 exam.

Texas Health and Human Services
The telehealth expansions for audio-only Medicaid services were set to expire on October 23rd. TPA worked with other stakeholder groups to ensure that providers continue to be reimbursed for these services throughout the remainder of the pandemic. (Note: The deadline has since been extended to Nov. 30.)

Texas Department of Insurance
In September, the Texas Department of Insurance’s (TDI) emergency rule requiring state-regulated insurance plans to cover services provided through telehealth expired. In addition to sending a letter to TDI
requesting adoption of a new emergency rule extending telehealth coverage, TPA leaned heavily on the Governor’s Office to adopt a new rule. Two weeks later, Governor Abbott announced that Texas’ major health insurers have agreed to continue reimbursing network health care providers for telehealth appointments at the same rate which they pay for office visits through the end of 2020.

**Legislative Advocacy**

In July, TPA President Dr. Megan Mooney was asked to present at a town hall hosted by Senator Judith Zaffirini, appropriately themed *Back to School: The ABC’s of COVID-19*. Her presentation, *C is for Coping: Staying Mentally Healthy During COVID-19*, was seen live by nearly 1,000 participants, many of them educators and school administrators.

In August, the House Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety issued a request for public comments related to the ongoing and long-term workforce needs of the state related to cybersecurity, mental health, law enforcement, and related professionals. TPA issued a joint letter reminding legislators that Texas ranks second in the nation for the highest number of Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas and the importance of the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program.

**COVID-19 Advocacy**

TPA continues to lead in advocacy efforts by TPA staff, consultants, and members.

Q3 advocacy efforts include a joint letter from the associations for mental health professionals to TDI requesting adoption of a new emergency rule extending telehealth coverage.

We are also working with other stakeholder groups to develop telehealth-related legislation.

Behind the scenes, TPA has:

- Continued communications with insurance companies like Blue Cross Blue Shield and Superior to provide reimbursement for telehealth
- Worked with TSBEP to address concerning rule language
- Continued coordination with other mental health professional groups in Texas
- Updated APA on TPA state advocacy efforts and prepared federal advocacy support

TPA continues to update its dedicated COVID-19 webpage with information for practitioners and helpful mental health resources.

**The Pro Bono Project: COVID-19**

TPA continues to offer its Pro Bono Project: COVID-19, which provides up to two hours of free mental health services to under or uninsured Texans. Individuals in need of support can visit TPA’s website for more information or email probono@texaspsyc.org. Services are generally provided by telephone.

If you have any questions about the information contained within this report, please email Jessica Magee at jessica@texaspsyc.org.