

National Multi-Stakeholder Coalition Responds to Senate Finance Committee RFI on Policy Proposals to Address Unmet Mental Health Needs

Washington DC— Last week, the Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness (CESIL), comprised of a diverse set of national organizations including consumer groups, health plans, health care providers, technology innovators, patient and family advocates, and community-based organizations, sent a letter to Senate Committee on Finance Chairman Ron Wyden and Ranking Member Mike Crapo in response to the Committees Request for Information on policy proposals to address unmet mental health needs.

The Coalition commends the Senate Finance Committee’s efforts to develop bipartisan legislation to address barriers to mental health care and recognize that effective policy solutions will help to mitigate the deleterious effects of social isolation and loneliness and promote a more socially connected country.

“Now more than ever, lawmakers must work across the aisle to address the unmet mental health needs that have become ever more apparent due to the COVID-19 pandemic”, said Andrew MacPherson, Founder & Co-Chair, CESIL, “We applaud Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo and the entire Senate Committee on Finance for taking this important first step and strongly urge the Committee to include in any legislation provisions related to controlling the social isolation and loneliness epidemic in this country.”

Social isolation and loneliness and the stigma associated with these issues are unfortunately something Americans have had to manage even prior to the pandemic. Notably, studies indicate anywhere from 25 to 45 percent of the total U.S. population was socially isolated or lonely, or both, prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency (“PHE”). The COVID-19 PHE has only exacerbated the issue. In a study conducted in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic a staggering 36% of respondents reported “serious loneliness” – that is, feeling lonely frequently or all the time. Furthermore, an alarming 61% of young people aged 18-25 reported serious loneliness.

To that end, the Coalition has identified policy solutions to Medicare, Medicaid & CHIP, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (“CMMI”), and other areas within the Committee’s jurisdiction to improve the state of social connection and mental health writ large in the United States. These policies include:

- Updates to Medicare coverage and reimbursement for social isolation and loneliness-related services
- Expanded Medicare reimbursement for telehealth, including audio-only services
- Implementing social isolation and loneliness screening services in a variety of federal programs under Committee jurisdiction
- Directing CMMI to include social isolation and loneliness-related flexibilities and payment incentives in new or existing models

“We look forward to working with the Committee on Finance toward enactment of these innovative policy solutions to support Americans of all ages’ health and well-being,” said MacPherson.



The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness developed these policy solutions with support from and in partnership with their diverse member organizations:

- Act Now for Mental Health (ANMH)
- American Psychological Association (APA)
- American Telemedicine Association
- Beyond Differences
- Capital Caring Health
- CareMore Health
- Centene Corporation
- Coalition to Transform Advanced Care (C-TAC)
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
- Education Development Center (EDC)
- Eventbrite
- Humana
- iN2L
- Juanita C. Grant Foundation
- Leading Age
- Lyft
- Make Room @ The Table (MR@TT)
- Meals on Wheels America
- Motion Picture & Television Fund (MPTF)
- National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
- National Council for Mental Wellbeing
- National Council on Aging (NCOA)
- National Partnership for Hospice Innovation (NPHI)
- National Partnership for Women & Families
- NeverTechLate
- Nextdoor
- PhRMA
- Pyx Health
- Resilient Georgia
- The Gerontological Society of America
- Trust for America's Health
- Uber Health
- UPMC Health Plan
- USAging

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***The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness** brings together a diverse set of national organizations including consumer groups, health plans, health care providers, technology innovators, patient advocates and more to develop and advocate for federal policy solutions to address the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness. For more information, please visit: www.endsocialisolation.org.*