

June 11, 2024

The Honorable Adriano Espaillat
2332 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Espaillat:

The undersigned mental health and substance use disorder treatment providers and patient advocates are writing to express our strong support for the Community Mental Wellness Worker Act. Your leadership on this important legislation is crucial given the issues confronting the mental health and substance use services delivery system.

The United States is experiencing a mental health and substance use crisis with increased levels of unmet behavioral health needs among people of all ages. At the same time, substantial shortages of addiction counselors, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists are projected in 2036. As of December 2023, more than half (169 million) of the U.S. population lives in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area according to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Concurrently, there is an increasing recognition that social determinants of mental health (SDOMH) are societal problems that disrupt mental health, increasing the risk of mental illness among certain groups, and worsen outcomes for individuals with mental illnesses.^[1] Much like the social determinants of health (SDOH), SDOMH include the non-medical factors that play a role in the likelihood and severity of behavioral health outcomes, such as income levels, education attainment, access to housing, and social inclusion^[2] as well as inadequate access to proper food, housing, and transportation.^[3]

Your innovative legislation addresses these pressing problems by furnishing front line providers with the means to recruit, train and deploy Community Mental Wellness Workers. These workers would be recruited from local communities and receive training, certification and ongoing supervision from community clinics to screen for common behavioral health conditions and deliver brief counseling interventions. Just as important, these Community Mental Wellness Workers would be charged with connecting their fellow citizens in need to housing assistance and nutritional services.

Last year, America lost more than 100,000 persons to drug overdoses and the U.S. Surgeon General has declared a children's mental health emergency. Our nation clearly needs more innovative behavioral health policy proposals. Thank you for your leadership on these matters.

Sincerely,

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Occupational Therapy Association
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Huntington's Disease Society
Inseparable
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Disability Rights Network
National League for Nursing
Psychotherapy Action Network
The Kennedy Forum
Western Youth Services and Postpartum Support International