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For the Week of June 17, 2019

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APA is celebrating a huge win for advancing psychology this week with the congressional testimony of APA CEO Arthur C. Evans, Jr., PhD, on behavioral health responses to the opioid crisis.

In addition, our advocacy staff is continuing to make progress in advocating on such critical issues as resources for older adults and caregivers, mental health parity, veterans' mental health, vulnerable children and scientific input at the Department of Justice.

APA CEO Testifies at Congressional Hearing on the Opioid Epidemic

On June 19, APA CEO Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, [testified](#) before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform at a hearing entitled "Medical Experts: Inadequate Federal Approach to Opioid Treatment and the Need to Expand Care." The committee requested Dr. Evans to testify to learn more about the behavioral health aspects of responding to the drug overdose crisis.

Evans spoke about the importance of adopting a "whole person" approach to substance use disorder treatment and called for the federal response to include support services to help people achieve long-term recovery—including the provision of psychosocial interventions as part of medication-assisted treatment. He also emphasized the need to improve access to psychological and other nonpharmacological pain management services to help prevent unnecessary exposure to opioids.

He also reiterated APA's support for the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency (CARE) Act (H.R. 2569), introduced by Committee Chair Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) and co-sponsored by more than half of the committee's members. The act would devote substantial new federal funding for substance use disorder treatment and recovery support services, using the model established under the Ryan White CARE Act to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. The CARE Act would channel assistance to local communities and give them flexibility in developing programs to meet their unique needs.

The hearing also featured representatives of the American Medical Association, the American Society of Addiction Medicine, National Nurses United and the nurse director of a front-line treatment program located in West Virginia. To watch a video of the hearing and read witnesses' statements, click [here](#).

The advocacy team helped prepare members of the committee for the hearing by sharing the [June APA Monitor](#) that focused on new solutions for the opioid crisis.

For more information, contact Scott Barstow at sbarstow@apa.org.

Celebrating Inclusion of Parity in Bill to Lower Health-Care Costs

The bipartisan [Lower Health Care Costs Act of 2019 \(S. 1895\)](#) was introduced this week by Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Ranking Member Murray (D-Wash.). The bill includes provisions that would strengthen enforcement of the mental health parity law and calls for training maternal health-care providers and other health professionals on implicit bias to reduce maternal health disparities. In addition, the bill would extend funding for five years for Community Health Centers and the National Health Service Corps, two critical programs that expand access to integrated behavioral health services and support loan repayment for psychologists. Earlier this month, APA sent a [letter](#) urging the HELP committee to include these provisions, including the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act of 2019 (S. 1737), in this broader legislation.

For more information, contact Amalia Corby at acorby-edwards@apa.org, Ian Clark at iclark@apa.org or Laurel Stine at lstine@apa.org.

Seeking to Protect the Mental Health of Caregivers and Older Adults

In a second [letter](#) to the Senate HELP Committee, APA recommended increased funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, additional efforts for addressing suicide in the aging population and a stronger focus on social isolation, with particular attention to the varying cultural needs of older adults. APA staff will follow up with further meetings on Capitol Hill on this legislation.

For more information, contact Serena Dávila, JD, at sdavila@apa.org.

Advising Members of Congress on Veteran Suicide and Military Sexual Trauma Disability Benefits

Helping members of Congress and their committees prepare for formal hearings is an effective way for APA to move its advocacy agenda forward because it can lead to federal officials discussing our priorities for the record. This week, APA staff was invited to provide a list of questions for a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in preparation for a hearing on veteran suicide prevention. In addition, in response to a request from the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, APA staff nominated an expert on military sexual trauma to testify at a hearing on veterans' disability benefits and evidentiary standards. Such behind-the-scenes support is a critical component of APA being recognized as a resource on Capitol Hill.

For more information, contact Heather O'Beirne Kelly, PhD, at hkelly@apa.org.

Gaining Recognition in Efforts to Improve Mental Health in Schools

APA was quoted this week in a [press release](#) from Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) commending his introduction of the Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act (S. 1642). This legislation would establish a program between universities and school systems to recruit and retain mental and behavioral health professionals who can provide services to students. Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) has introduced the companion bill, H.R. 2958, in the House. APA provided Tester and Chu with letters of endorsement that underscore the need for more professionals in schools.

For more information, contact Karen Studwell, JD, at kstudwell@apa.org.

Working to Protect Data on Vulnerable Children

In [comments](#) to the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families, APA opposed provisions in a proposed rule that would eliminate data elements from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) that are focused on some of the most vulnerable children within the child welfare system. AFCARS is the primary federal data set capturing the experiences of children and families served by foster care and Title IV-E adoption services.

APA urged the Children's Bureau to collect data on the self-reported sexual orientation and gender identity of youth, as well as the sexual orientation of foster and adoptive parents. Further, APA recommended that all data elements related to the Indian Child Welfare Act be reinstated in the AFCARS final rule as very little data is available about Indian youth and therefore keeping these data elements is critical to understanding needs and developing necessary services. APA will continue to monitor proposed changes to AFCARS.

For more information, contact Cynthia Whitney, MPA, at cmalley@apa.org.

Advocating for a Science Advisory Board Within the Department of Justice

APA sent a [letter](#) to Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) in support of his bill, the [Improving Justice Programs through Science Act of 2019](#), which would establish a Science Advisory Board at the Department of Justice. Previously chartered from January 2010 through March 2017, the advisory board provided an extra-agency review of and recommendations for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), ensuring research, statistics and grant programs were scientifically sound. Reinstating the board would continue this important oversight and foster OJP members' understanding and appreciation of the complexities of implementing and evaluating new approaches to criminal and juvenile justice.

For more information, contact Geoff Mumford, PhD, at gmumford@apa.org.