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With Congress back from recess APA's advocacy staff have been advancing our agenda on enforcing mental health parity, battling vaccine hesitancy, supporting gun violence research and protecting youth in sentencing.

Promoting Mental Health Parity

APA and its coalition partners in the [Mental Health Liaison Group](#) sent a letter to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee urging them to include the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act of 2019 in legislation being developed to lower health-care costs. The coalition letter, [found here](#), continues APA's efforts to ensure mental health services are at parity with physical health. The need for parity enforcement is highlighted by APA CEO Arthur Evans, PhD, in the [bill's press release](#).

For more information, contact Laurel Stine at LStine@apa.org.

Celebrating House Passage of a Bill to Advance Immigration Policy

The House of Representatives has passed the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019, which would create a path to citizenship for more than two million undocumented immigrants and offer legal status to more than 400,000 individuals covered by Temporary Protected Status. APA members and staff have advocated for years on the measure. On April 23, APA [sent a letter](#) to House and Senate leadership supporting policies like those advanced in H.R. 6, including the physical and mental health consequence on immigrants who fear deportation; the stress and emotional trauma for children who are separated from their parents; and the uncertainty created for Dreamers. The measure now advances to the Senate, where its chances of passing are not as certain.

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

Highlighting Advocacy and Deep Poverty at Department of Veterans Affairs Psychology Leadership Conference

APA joined our Div. 18/VA Section and the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders to co-host the 22nd annual VA Psychology Leadership Conference, in San Antonio. Hundreds of VA psychologists, from trainees to senior chiefs in VA medical centers, attended the conference, which was focused on “promoting quality, integrated care for all veterans” and featured an inspirational keynote address by APA President Dr. Rosie Phillips Davis on deep poverty and its impact on veterans. Dr. Heather O’Beirne Kelly provided an overview of APA’s federal advocacy agenda on behalf of veterans, families, caregivers, and the psychologists who serve this community, including enhancing veteran suicide prevention efforts and opposing VA privatization.

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

Supporting Legislation to Address Vaccine Hesitancy

In a [letter](#) to U.S. Rep. Kim Schrier (D-WA), APA expressed support of her new bill, H.R. 2862, which would equip the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with the resources it needs to study what drives vaccine hesitancy and barriers to immunization, which in turn would allow the CDC to better track where there are changes in vaccine confidence or refusal rates. With this information, the CDC can better predict where disease outbreaks may occur, then target its vaccine education campaigns to those areas. To inform the legislation as it advances, APA outlined the role psychological science could play in developing more effective messages to increase public understanding of vaccines’ effectiveness.

For more information, contact Shannon Wood at swood@apa.org.

Preserving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program

APA staff continued its outreach to new members of Congress to educate them and their staff about the importance of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program, which incentivizes psychologists and others with student debt to pursue careers in public service. This week, staff reached out to Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and Rep. Donna Shalala (D-FL), former Secretary of Health and Human Services, two Freshman members of the House Education and Labor Committee. As the committee plans to reauthorize the Higher Education Act this year, APA and a delegation of psychology training faculty, early career psychologists and psychology students are scheduling 100 visits to the Hill as part of the June 2019 Federal Education Advocacy Coordinators Summit to boost our advocacy efforts on behalf of this critical workforce program.

For more information, contact Alix Ginsberg, MPH, at aginsberg@apa.org.

Calling for Flexible Sentencing for Youth

APA joined with coalition partners to advocate for three bills (H.R. 1949, H.R. 1950, and H.R. 1951) that call for the federal criminal justice system to consider childhood trauma, sexual abuse and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) during sentencing for children. In a letter to congressional leaders, APA and its partners pointed out that the criminal justice system is overrepresented with children who have experienced childhood trauma and other ACEs. The letter urges that judges consider a child's background and exposure to childhood trauma, such as abuse or trafficking, when determining sentencing.

For more information, contact Amalia Corby at acorby-edwards@apa.org.

Applauding Efforts to Safeguard Medical Positions in the Military

The House Armed Services Committee introduced its Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 2500) this week, and APA was pleased to see language included that would substantially slow, if not halt altogether, the Defense Health Agency's planned elimination of 18,000 uniformed military medical positions, including military psychologists. APA has been meeting with Capitol Hill staff for months to prevent elimination of these billets, given the likely impact on military personnel and families seeking mental health care, particularly in remote areas.

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

Urging the FDA to Immediately Regulate Cannabidiol

On May 31, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) held a [public hearing](#) to provide opportunities for comment on issues related to the regulation of cannabidiol (CBD) derived from hemp. Last summer, a specific formulation of cannabidiol was approved by FDA for treating two rare forms of pediatric epilepsy. However, under the 2018 Farm Bill, hemp (and thus hemp-derived CBD) was no longer considered a controlled substance, a change that has led to confusion over how CBD will be regulated

moving forward. Two of the speakers who presented at the FDA hearing were APA member scientists: [Ryan Vandrey, PhD](#) and [Elise Weerts, PhD](#). They provided compelling arguments calling for FDA to immediately initiate regulation over CBD content labelling, quality control standards, Current Good Manufacturing Practices and a program of regulatory science for cannabis derivatives—much as FDA has done for tobacco.

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

Testifying at the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research Advisory Council Meeting

More gun violence research is needed on older adults, according to testimony given on APA's behalf by Robert Kinscherff, JD, PhD, at the advisory board meeting of the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research at the RAND Corporation in Arlington, Virginia. His presentation, which also featured contributions from APA members Amy Fiske, PhD, and Susan Sorenson, PhD, also centered on the need for research on the implementation and enforcement of firearms laws. The collaborative was seeded with a \$20 million gift from Arnold Ventures and is now finalizing its second request for proposals that will support research on gun policy and support the development of fair and effective policies.

For more information, contact Ben Vonachen, MA, at bvonachen@apa.org.

Promoting Psychology in Bipartisan Senate Health Care Bill

In a [letter](#) to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) leadership, APA provided comments to Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) on a draft of the [Lower Health Care Costs Act of 2019](#). The bill aims to improve health-care outcomes and consumer access to health data while lowering costs. Among other things, APA asked the HELP Committee to consider the unique challenges psychologists face in collecting and sharing patient data and in contracting with health plans to provide services.

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

Calling for Funding Increases for Priority Programs

APA called on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education to increase investment in programs that support science, education and underserved populations in FY 2020. In [testimony](#) submitted for the record, APA asked the subcommittee to fund firearm violence prevention research at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; increase funding for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and the Graduate Psychology Education program; and support programs to prevent suicide and child abuse. The subcommittee is likely to mark up its bill on June 25.

For more information contact Pat Kobor at pkobor@apa.org.

Recommending Funding to Assist Behavioral Health Providers with Electronic Health Records

APA, as a member of the Behavioral Health Information Coalition, submitted [recommendations](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. The coalition proposes changes to existing programs to entice providers to adopt electronic health records. These proposals include fully funding existing EHR demonstrations programs.

For more information, contact Laurel Stine at LStine@apa.org.