



# CGS FAMILY CENTER

Providing Help, Creating Hope, Preserving Dignity.

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United States Senate  
Committee of Finance  
Washington, DC, 20510-62

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To whom it may concern,

Catholic Guardian Services has been serving children and families in underserved communities since the late 1890's. Throughout the past several years, mental illness has been one of the most prevalent issues impacting the communities we serve. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the behavioral health needs of our community and put an enormous strain on the healthcare system. Access to behavioral health services has become scarce in a time where children and families are enduring more social isolation, crisis, financial hardship, and abuse. In order to tackle the barriers that constrict access to behavioral health services, I believe it is essential we adopt more social welfare policies that encourage states to aggressively fund care coordination models for communities in need.

Care coordination allows for the integration of services that center on the comprehensive needs of the patient and family thereby leading to decreased healthcare costs, reduction in fragmented treatment, and improvement in the patient/family experience of care. Care coordination also helps breakdown barriers between behavioral health and primary care as well as allows individuals to capitalize on holistic treatment to efficiently meet their needs. Moreover, care coordination significantly improves the probability of patients successfully transitioning between levels of care, attending outpatient mental health/substance abuse treatment, and reintegrating back into the community.

In addition to crafting policies that encourage states to heavily invest in care coordination models, another area that can benefit from policy change is incentivizing states to develop more innovative transportation strategies for individuals diagnosed with behavioral health conditions and/or who are actively seeking treatment. Oftentimes individuals and families seeking care are in a very fragile state (i.e. in crisis, recently discharged from the emergency room, exiting inpatient psychiatric hospitals, long-term care facility, etc.) and lack the necessary resources (i.e. travel funds) to attend appointments consistently or even successfully enroll in treatment. In turn,

this tends to lead to a sharp decline in health, which then further overwhelms our health care system. Innovative strategies centered on transportation solutions will provide individuals with the necessary



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resources and pathways to access care successfully and therefore decrease state health care costs (i.e. emergency room visits, inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations, etc.).

Federal incentive programs can also be effective in encouraging states to fully integrate visual telehealth technology in all systems of care and ensure citizens seeking treatment have access to the technological resources needed (i.e. equipment, training, access to direct care professionals to navigate software/set-up, etc.) to maximize their ability to access support. Today, telehealth technology has been instrumental with expanding access to care to communities in need in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Telehealth technology can especially be effective with working with vulnerable youth populations who are often reluctant and/or ashamed to share with their peers they are suffering from behavioral health disruption (i.e. particularly depression and anxiety) due to fears of being ridiculed and bullied. Telehealth allows youth access to licensed behavioral health professionals all at the touch of their fingertips, which can considerably help to decrease the rate of teen suicide and enable youth to cope with internal and external stressors more effectively.

I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts on the importance of this matter and potential solutions to eradicate barriers to care. If you have any questions please feel free to reach out to me at (646) 662-2632 or [Orlandomendoza@catholicguardian.org](mailto:Orlandomendoza@catholicguardian.org).

Sincerely,



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