



# HILL DAY 2024

NATIONAL  
COUNCIL  
for Mental  
Wellbeing

## GROWING AND SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

### BOTTOM LINE



Our nation continues to grapple with a significant mental health and substance use care workforce shortage. Roughly 122 million people live in mental health professional shortage areas<sup>1</sup> — we need solutions now to meet the demand for care.

### THE ASK



Cosponsor and support passage of the Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2023 ([H.R.1638/S.838](#)), Promoting Effective and Empowering Recovery Services (PEERS) Act of 2023 ([H.R.6748/S.3498](#)) and Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2023 ([H.R.4933/S.462](#)).

## WHY WE NEED THIS LEGISLATION

### Improving Access to Mental Health Act

Clinical social workers (CSWs) comprise one of the largest groups of behavioral health providers in the country, and in some rural areas, they're the only behavioral health providers.<sup>2</sup> With the number of Americans over the age of 65 projected to nearly double in the next decade<sup>3</sup> and nearly 1 in 5 older adults experiencing a mental illness or substance use disorder,<sup>4</sup> supporting CSWs is critical.

This bill would increase the Medicare reimbursement rate for CSWs from 75% to 85% of the physician fee schedule for nonphysician providers, mitigating reimbursement inequity among behavioral health care providers and expanding access to high-quality care for more Medicare beneficiaries in their communities. The legislation would also ensure CSWs can provide psychosocial services to patients in skilled nursing facilities, as well as the full range of Health and Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI) services within their scope of practice.

## PEERS in Medicare Act

Peer support is an effective and evidence-based practice,<sup>5</sup> and the PEERS Act would ensure Medicare beneficiaries have improved access to the vital, life-saving services certified peer support specialists provide. Allowing Medicare beneficiaries access to certified peer support specialists will expand access to services and reduce costly hospitalizations.

- This bill authorizes peer support services to be reimbursed by Medicare in four settings: Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), community mental health centers, federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics. Additionally, the legislation provides a definition of peer support specialists in the Medicare program.

## Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act

By easing the burden of student loan debt for qualified professionals who work in mental health and substance use disorder care, this bill will help recruit and retain workers, helping to serve more people in need of care.

- This bill reauthorizes through 2032 and broadens the Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Loan Repayment Program (STAR LRP) to include mental health treatment providers who work in mental health professional shortage areas. For each year of service, the bill would repay one-sixth of the individual's eligible loans, up to \$250,000.



**LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR HILL DAY 2024  
ADVOCACY PARTNERS!**

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>

<sup>2</sup> <https://onlinesocialwork.vcu.edu/blog/clinical-social-worker/#:~:text=According%20to%20NASW%2C%20clinical%20social,only%20mental%20health%20service%20providers>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.prb.org/resources/fact-sheet-aging-in-the-united-states/>

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), Older Adults Living with Serious Mental Illness: The State of the Behavioral Health Workforce (2019). <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/older-adults-living-serious-mental-illness-smi-state-behavioral-health-workforce/pep19>

<sup>5</sup> <https://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/SMDL/downloads/SMD081507A.pdf>