



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

T 907.729.7510 F 907.729.7506 • 4000 Ambassador Drive, Suite 101 • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • www.anhb.org

April 12, 2024

Representative Mike Prax
State Capitol Room 108
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: ANHB Support of House Concurrent Resolution 9

Dear Representative Prax,

The Alaska Native Health Board¹ (ANHB) writes in support of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 9, recognizing the urgent need for parity in mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in Alaska. This resolution serves as the first step towards streamlining access to services statewide by addressing administrative burdens and advocating for regulatory changes to ensure parity between physical and behavioral health services.

Currently, the excessive administrative and clinical documentation requirements for behavioral health and substance use disorder services surpass those of medical care services. This unnecessary reporting and documentation burden detracts from direct patient care and leads to prolonged wait times for services; often individuals foregoing necessary treatment due to these delays. HCR 9 aims to address these issues by urging the Department of Health to adopt regulations that address administrative barriers and promote parity, facilitating access to critical mental health and substance use disorder services.

Even though Alaska, as a fee-for-service state, is not required to comply with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Act of 2008 (MHPAEA), a federal law designed to prevent discriminatory benefit limitations on mental health or substance use disorder benefits compared to medical or surgical benefits, we support the Legislature in aligning with this federal standard. Under parity standard regulations, private insurers would be obligated to cover behavioral health services, thereby preventing insurers, including Medicaid, from creating obstacles for individuals seeking behavioral healthcare compared to physical healthcare. Thirty-seven other states—including other fee-for-service states such as Wyoming, Vermont, and Maine—have already adopted their own parity laws to ensure equitable access to behavioral health services.

This resolution comes at a critical time as the nation, including Alaska, experiences a rise in individuals with behavioral health and substance use treatment needs. It

¹ Established in 1968, ANHB's mission is to promote the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. ANHB is the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues for the Alaska Tribal Health System, which is comprised of Tribes/Tribal Health Organizations that serve all 229 Tribes and over 188,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the Alaska. As the statewide advocacy organization, ANHB supports achieving effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF ATHABASCAN
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

KARLUK IRA
TRIBAL COUNCIL

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE

KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

KODIAK AREA
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

MANIILAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUTNA

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF TYONEK

NINILCHIK
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

NORTON SOUND
HEALTH CORPORATION

SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

aims to remove barriers to access, decrease administrative burdens on clinicians, and improve health outcomes in Alaska by increasing access to care.

ANHB appreciates the opportunity to support legislation that promotes Alaskans' access to mental health and substance use treatment in Alaska. If you have any comments or questions on our letter, you may contact ANHB at anhb@anhb.org or via telephone at (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wm F. Smith".

Chief William F. Smith, Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board
Tribally-Elected Leader of the Valdez Native Tribe

Cc: house.rules@akleg.gov