



431 NORTH FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 203
JUNEAU, AK 99801
907-465-8920

March 13, 2024

RE: HCR9/SCR9 Support

Dear Members of the House Health and Social Services Committee,

The joint mission of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) and the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) is to advocate for programs and services that promote healthy, independent, productive Alaskans. AMHB/ABADA are statutorily charged with advising, planning, and coordinating behavioral health services and programs funded by the State of Alaska.

The Boards strongly support the proposed resolution recognizing the imperative need for parity in the provision of mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in our state. The considerations outlined in the resolution, regarding the existing disparities and challenges in the current system, highlight the critical importance of addressing these issues for the well-being of our community members.

The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) represents a crucial federal law that endeavors to prevent discriminatory practices in group health plans and health insurance issuers providing mental health or substance use disorder benefits. However, the current situation in our state, as detailed in the resolution, underscores the urgency of adopting specific regulations to ensure that these parity requirements are met or exceeded within the framework of our medical assistance plan.

The notable disparities in the regulatory landscape, particularly the extensive page difference between regulations for mental health and substance use disorder benefits versus medical and surgical benefits, reveal an unjust burden on providers and clients. The detrimental impact on access to outpatient and inpatient mental health and substance use disorder services further underscores the pressing need for comprehensive reform.

The Boards wholeheartedly endorse the resolution's call for the Department of Health to adopt regulations that ensure parity for medical assistance providers and recipients. This commitment is crucial for achieving several important outcomes, including equitable access to care, streamlined care coordination, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, reduced reliance on emergency rooms and correctional facilities, and the cultivation of a stable and effective behavioral health workforce.

Sincerely,

James Savage, Chair
Alaska Mental Health Board

Renee Schofield, Chair
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse



