

## ***Defending Mental Health Parity in Maine***

The Maine Clinical Counselors Association has joined a broad coalition of mental health providers, provider organizations and other stakeholders to address potential challenges to the Maine Mental Health Parity law. The group has already submitted legislation requiring a study of the impact of any proposed changes to parity before any vote can be taken to alter the law. The coalition is also reviewing and preparing to defend other existing mandated health insurance benefits if and when challenges arise to these following the reshuffling of leadership in Augusta in the coming legislative session.

The Maine Mental Health Parity law mandates that group health insurance plans covering 20 or more employees must provide equal coverage for mental and physical health services. It specifically mandates coverage for certain listed diagnoses, and, of importance to LCPCs, it includes coverage of services provided by counseling professionals.

There is also a federal parity law, The Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equality Act, passed in 2008, which will be coming into full implementation this year. However, this law only mandates that group insurance plans offer mental health benefits for employers with over 50 (unlike Maine's 20) employees. Because the Maine law is stronger than the federal it is critical that we assure the continued existence of both.

Other mandates of importance to clinical counselors are the coverage of LCPCs, Licensed Pastoral, and Marriage and Family Counselors as third party reimbursable for mental health services in general.

These issues are of critical importance to LCPC's because they directly affect our ability to diagnose and treat clients. In fact, if mandates are placed on the cutting block, our very ability to do our work could be in jeopardy. The elimination, for instance, of the 2003 mandate to be reimbursed by third party payers would basically put us out of business as mainstream providers. MCCA has worked hard over the years to elevate and protect the status of LCPCs and other counseling professionals in Maine. We will keep you updated on all issues that may have an important impact on your work as a clinical counselor.

Please feel free to contact MCCA for further information about this project or to get involved in our leadership efforts.

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