

UNDERWOOD INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO MAKE PRIMARY CARE, MENTAL HEALTH CARE, AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT MORE AFFORDABLE

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The Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act would require insurance to cover three primary care visits and three outpatient mental health or substance use disorder treatment visits per year without charging patients out-of-pocket costs

WASHINGTON—Today, Representative Lauren Underwood (IL-14) introduced new legislation to help more Americans access the health care they need. The *Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act* would require private insurance plans to cover three annual primary care visits and three annual outpatient mental health or substance use disorder visits without charging a copayment, coinsurance, or deductible-related fee. The legislation is co-sponsored by Representatives Kim Schrier, M.D. (WA-08) and Katie Porter (CA-45).

Underwood unveiled the reintroduction of the legislation in an Aurora press conference alongside Representative Bill Foster (IL-11), Dr. Jihad Shoshara, President of Pediatric Health Associates, David Gomel, President and CEO of Rosecrance Health Network, and Sara Gray, Executive Director NAMI Kane-South, DeKalb and Kendall Counties, who discussed the importance of the legislation and shared how the legislation would help the communities they serve.

“Out-of-pocket health care costs are too high, and they keep too many Americans from seeking the care they need. Here in Illinois, people are asked to pay hundreds of dollars out of their pockets just to see their primary care doctor for a cold or to get treatment for a mental health condition like anxiety, depression, or addiction—the kind of care that benefits individuals and keeps our communities healthy,” said Rep. Underwood. **“In a pandemic, it’s more important than ever that we enact the Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act to ensure that financial barriers don’t come between Illinoisans and the primary and mental health care they need.”**

“As a pediatrician, I know that when parents and patients have a strong relationship with their primary care doctor, it maximizes the chances of early detection, which leads to better long-term outcomes and lower costs. As a child, my parents didn’t always have health insurance - and as a result, I did not have access to a regular pediatrician. Now that I am a physician today, I am passionate

in my belief that all patients should have access to high-quality and affordable health care. This means that out-of-pocket costs shouldn't be a barrier for patients to seek primary care - and no co-pay should ever come between me and my patients. That's why I'm proud to support Congresswoman Underwood's efforts to expand access to care by reducing the financial barriers for primary care visits," said Dr. Jihad Shoshara, President of Pediatric Health Associates.

"As one of the leading providers of behavioral health services and a nationally recognized substance use disorder treatment program, we know the importance of making sure that patients have access to quality, affordable care. Every day as we work with patients in our care, Rosecrance sees firsthand the importance of healthcare policy that treats screening, early intervention, treatment, and recovery support for patients with substance use disorders– services that shouldn't be blocked by heavy financial barriers. The Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act encourages preventative behavioral healthcare, which is more effective and more affordable than allowing symptoms to fester untreated. This bill helps people access care by removing financial barriers to treatment," said David Gomel, President and CEO of Rosecrance Health Network.

"Over the past year, we have seen an entire nation challenged by a public health emergency. Its impact on the economy, employment, and our mental health, has made the issue of paying for health care more salient than ever. Behavioral health is no exception. Rep. Underwood's legislation is timely, and necessary. The people of Illinois are grateful for her leadership, as she understands how important behavioral health is not just in general, but to our collective recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic as well," Jud DeLoss, CEO, Illinois Association for Behavioral Health.

Photos of the press conference can be found [here](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nbb7tu57334iknn/AAAkplCPJ9s3yX4yVmg0UChMa?dl=0) (<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nbb7tu57334iknn/AAAkplCPJ9s3yX4yVmg0UChMa?dl=0>).

Approximately one in four Americans skip necessary medical care because of costs. Out-of-pocket costs, which can be over \$200 for a single mental health visit, are a key barrier to seeking care. By reducing financial barriers for these visits, the *Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act* would help patients access the care they need to improve their health and well-being.

The *Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act* has received endorsements from leading health care organizations in Illinois and across the country, including 2020 Mom; American Academy of PAs; American Association for Men in Nursing; American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work; American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry; American Association of Colleges of Nursing; American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP); American Association on Health and Disability; American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; American Nephrology Nurses Association; American Psychological Association; Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies; Behavioral Health and Social Justice; Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance; International OCD Foundation; Lakeshore Foundation; March of Dimes; Mom Congress;

National Association for Rural Mental Health; National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors; National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners; National Association of Social Workers; National Council for Mental Wellbeing; National League for Nursing; National Register of Health Service Psychologists; No Health Without Mental Health; Oncology Nursing Society; Physician Assistant Education Association; SMART Recovery; and The Ohio State University College of Nursing.

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