



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
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Co-Sponsor the Accelerating the Development of Advanced Psychology Trainees (ADAPT) Act [H.R.4484/S.2356]

A strong mental and behavioral health workforce is critical to combating the long-term impact of the pandemic and remedying longstanding gaps in care. Unfortunately, multiple barriers exist to growing the doctoral psychology workforce. This includes the rising costs associated with pursuing a doctoral degree, which most students are increasingly financing through loans, and lack of federal support for *advanced psychology trainees* (doctoral interns and post-doctoral residents).

THE NATION'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Our nation's mental and behavioral health continues to be in a state of crisis; one quarter of U.S. adults report alarming levels of stress and anxiety.ⁱ Predictably, psychologists report high demand for treatment for anxiety and depression. Practitioners are seeing increased workloads and longer waitlists, which have contributed to higher levels of burnout within the profession.ⁱⁱ

It is estimated that 158 million U.S. residents—nearly half of the population—live in a mental health workforce shortage area.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, nearly every county and district in the country has at least one federally designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area. These shortages are expected to persist over the next decade, with rural communities facing major challenges in recruiting licensed mental and behavioral health care professionals.^{iv, v, vi}

With the rapidly aging U.S. population, investments in Medicare are more essential than ever as the Census Bureau projects greater demands for healthcare, in-home caregiving and assisted living facilities.^{vii} In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported the number of suicides deaths in the U.S. reached an all-time high in 2022. The CDC reported a significant increase in suicide among older demographics — for people 65 and older, suicide deaths rose by 8.1 percent, from 9,652 in 2021 to 10,433 in 2022.^{viii}

Doctoral-level clinical psychologists play a crucial role in providing behavioral health services to Medicare beneficiaries, as their practices account for more than a third of all psychiatric diagnostic services, roughly 40% of all psychotherapy services, more than 90% of all health and behavior services, and three-quarters of all psychological and neuropsychological testing and assessment services.

ADVANCED PSYCHOLOGY TRAINEES

Doctoral degrees in psychology typically require 5-6 years to complete. The doctoral internship and post-doctoral residency represent the most advanced stage of training in the psychology training sequence, equivalent to medical residencies and fellowships in the medical training sequence. Each year, approximately 4,000 doctoral students participate in the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) National Internship Match to complete their doctoral internship, which is required for the awarding of a doctoral degree in psychology. In addition, each year approximately 900 psychologists who have obtained their doctoral degree pursue a post-doctoral residency to complete specialty training or accrue additional hours needed to become fully licensed in their state.

BACKGROUND

Despite the high demand for their services, multiple barriers exist to educating and training psychologists, including the cost of attending graduate school, which most students are increasingly financing by taking on student debt.^{ix} Unlike physicians, doctoral-level psychologists are not eligible for Medicare-funded residency programs through Graduate Medical Education (GME). Although clinical psychology interns typically receive 1,000-2,000 hours of clinical experience prior to beginning their internship, services provided by trainees under the supervision of a licensed psychologist are not reimbursable under Medicare, nor are services provided by psychology residents engaged in post-doctoral degree training.

The lack of support for psychology interns and residents under the nation's single largest health insurance program makes it difficult to support training programs, increase the workforce, and has trickle-down effects throughout the rest of the healthcare landscape. Although these services are not reimbursed in Medicare, the value of services provided by advanced psychology trainees has already been recognized by CMS in Medicaid. With CMS' approval, 29 state Medicaid programs currently provide at least some coverage of services provided by advanced psychology trainees (AL, AK, AR, DE, GA, ID, IN, IA, KY, MA, MI, MN, MO, NE, NH, NV, NM, ND, OH, OK, OR, SC, TX, UT, VT, VA, WV, WI, and WY). In addition, legislation recently passed in Hawaii (HI) and Washington (WA) that authorizes the billing of these services in the future.

SOLUTION

Congress should pass *The Accelerating the Development of Advanced Psychology Trainees (ADAPT) Act (H.R.4484/S.2356)*. This legislation would establish Medicare coverage of behavioral health services provided by advanced psychology trainees by directing CMS to develop a Medicare modifier to allow psychology trainees to bill for behavioral healthcare provided under the supervision of a licensed psychologist. This modifier would be similar to the GE modifier currently used for billing for services provided by primary care medical residents. For behavioral health services such as psychotherapy, the new GE modifier would allow for supervision of clinical services through one-on-one weekly supervision sessions, with the supervising psychologist being available but not required to be present for the entire time services are delivered.

As there continues to be a nationwide need for a strong behavioral health workforce, establishing billing modifiers for advanced psychology trainee services would increase the current workforce to help meet the nation's growing demand for mental and behavioral health services.

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Note: A special thanks to Alex Gajewski for his assistance in the development of this resource.