NASW National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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Mental Health and Substance Use: Access to Prevention, Treatment and Coverage
Public Hearing of the Office of Health Care Advocate

Medicaid Expansion of Providers to Licensed Clinical Social Workers in Private Practice for HUSKY C & D

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The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 3,200 professional social workers statewide calls upon the State of Connecticut, through the Department of Social Services to authorize Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) in independent practice to be eligible for provider status under HUSKY C & D. Such an expansion will be in keeping with, and provide parity with the current eligibility of LCSWs as providers for the HUSKY A & B program.

LCSWs have been authorized for third party reimbursement in Connecticut since 1990. All major private insurance companies offer provider status to LCSWs in private practice in both the group and individual plans. Federally, licensed clinical social workers are recognized providers under Medicare, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and TRICARE/CHAMPUS. Perhaps of greatest relevance, LCSWs are valuable independent providers for Medicaid HUSKY A & B.

The HUSKY C & D population has significant mental health needs that may not be fully met under the current program due to limited access to qualified mental health providers. This population often presents complex situations with multiple needs where case management services are necessary along with more traditional behavioral health treatment. Having providers who are trained in biopsychosocial needs, who understand systems theory and can offer a person-in-environment approach to a client's presenting issues is critical to properly serving the HUSKY C & D enrollees. The training of professional social workers fits exactly with this needed approach.

In February 2012 NASW/CT conducted a survey of our members in private practice to determine the interest level in being a provider under HUSKY C & D. A total of 167 social workers responded and 62.3% indicated they would like to be able to serve the adult Medicaid population. Of the remainder, 25.1% were not sure and only 13.2% did not want to accept HUSKY covered adults. These results should be of no surprise as social workers historically have a professional commitment to working with low income individuals and families and vulnerable populations.

In past discussions between NASW/CT and DSS questions were raised by the Department as to response time of private practitioners and collaborative relationships between a LCSW and a prescriber. Our survey answered these questions by finding that 69.8% of the respondents accept after hour calls and 58.4% said they respond to calls within 8 hours, and within 12 hours 78.9% said they respond to a call. All respondents indicated they return calls within 24 hours. As for working with a psychiatrist or other prescriber, 65.6%

reported having a collaborative relationship with a practitioner who can prescribe medication, with 28.6% saying the prescriber accepts Medicaid, 38.1% were not sure and only 34.1% said the prescriber was not a Medicaid provider.

NASW/CT was able to identify 10 states where clinical social workers are Medicaid providers, including Rhode Island and Vermont. Since not all of our inquiries were responded to we would expect that there are additional states where clinical social workers are authorized providers.

Nationally clinical social workers provide two-thirds of all mental health services and we estimate this to be the case in Connecticut. LCSWs practice in all areas of the state thus offering increased access to care, which addresses geographical barriers to care. LCSWs provide cost effective care and as our survey clearly indicated are willing to accept Medicaid reimbursement rates. LCSWs are effectively providing mental health services to the HUSKY A & B enrollees and HUSKY C & D enrollees deserve the same opportunity to choose a licensed clinical social worker as their mental health provider.