



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

June 17, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator Verma:

On behalf of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) I want to thank you for your comments at the June 9<sup>th</sup> STAT News event where you expressed your support to permanently expand the use of telehealth services and technologies after the expiration of the current public health crisis.

DBSA is the leading national peer-focused organization for people living with mood disorder. Our national network of chapters offers over 600 weekly support group meeting around the country; and DBSA reaches over four million individuals with support, educational resources, and tools to help individuals living with mood disorders lead productive and fulfilling lives. Additionally, through our advocacy efforts we amplify peers' voices and work towards systemic change in the delivery of mental health care.

We regularly hear through our chapters and directly from participants of local support groups of the need to expand access to mental health services, both therapeutic resources and medical management needs. The ability for Americans to access this vital and essential set of services has been interrupted due to the need for physical distancing in response to the impact of the Covid-19 virus. A survey of our community—conducted between April 14 and May 20—revealed 78% of the respondents are utilizing mental health telehealth services. The vast majority, 96%, are new to these services. Forty-one percent indicated they had been receiving telehealth services for the last several months and 55% in just the last few days or weeks.

The expanded use of telehealth services for those living with mood disorders has been critical to allowing mental health therapeutic and medical management services be available to individuals seeking help. This has been particularly true for essential workers in a range of settings and those who live in underserved areas. We believe it is important to offer a range of telehealth modalities including the use of audio calls for those who are unable to access or uncomfortable with using video conference calls. We recognize the importance of creating safe and private environments for both peers and clinicians to share confidential information and appreciate the complementary work being done to address the applicable privacy rules.

The work of CMS in assisting states with flexibility on Medicaid regulations and allowing Medicare providers to adapt to these new realities has been most appreciated. We recognize that most of these changes are temporary and stand ready to work with you to advocate for necessary legislation to make them permanent. Please feel to reach out to us for further ways we can work together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Pollock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent than the last name "Pollock".

Michael Pollock  
Chief Executive Officer