



Senate Finance Committee
February 19, 2020

Senate Bill 502

**Health Insurance - Telehealth - Delivery of Mental Health Services –
Coverage for Home Settings**

Support with Amendments

The National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence-Maryland supports Senate Bill 502 **with an amendment to include substance use services**. Fundamentally, NCADD-Maryland believes that the appropriate use of technology in the delivery of somatic and behavioral health care should be utilized to its potential. Telehealth is an important part of a health care delivery system that leads to success with regard to access, patient compliance, and positive health outcomes.

For substance use disorders, telehealth can increase access to addiction treatment services by removing the barriers of geography and stigma. The chronic nature of the disease calls for new ways for clinicians to stay connected with patients over extended periods of time. The ability of patients to be able to be in non-clinical settings will be a benefit to those who are in crisis and not able to get to such a setting; those who are home-bound; and those whose personal lives are so busy and possibly chaotic that they cannot physically be in a clinical setting in a timely manner.

To allow for this expansion without being inclusive of both mental health and substance use disorders is not smart policy. The prevalence of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders is at a minimum 40% of those needing treatment. Under this bill, a clinician would be able to use telehealth with the client in their home and talk about their depression, but if the conversation turned to their alcoholism, the conversation would have to stop. From a clinical perspective, this does not make sense. From a legal perspective, this bill would be in violation of the federal Parity Act.

As technology continues to develop and its uses expand in applications related to health care, policies must ensure that no disease space, no clinician type, and no patient be left behind. We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 502 with an amendment to include substance use disorder services:

Amendment No. 1

On page 2, in line 20, after MENTAL HEALTH insert AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.