AAMFT Continues Pressing Congress for Medicare MFT Coverage

Despite last-minute exclusion, the AAMFT continues to work with allies toward the goal of Medicare MFT coverage within the Health Reform bill. We are joined in our Medicare MFT/LPC Coalition by the American Counseling Association, the American Mental Health Counselors Association, the National Board for Certified Counselors, the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, and the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (community mental health centers’ association).

Our Coalition anticipates that Congress may revisit Medicare MFT and Counselor coverage in a broad “Medicare Extenders” bill in late 2010. The AAMFT will inform members when the issue becomes active again.

In addition to lobbying by staff of the Coalition groups, the AAMFT is increasing our Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions to key Members of Congress; those who either have supported this issue or who are leaders with the power to make it happen. Recent AAMFT-PAC recipients include Sens. Baucus (D-MT, chair of the Senate’s Medicare committee), Sherrerd Brown (D-OH, Medicare MFT supporter), and Wyden (D-OR, Senate Medicare committee member and issue supporter) as well as Reps. Levin (D-MI), new chair of one of the House’s two Medicare committees) and Baldwin (D-WI, member of the other House Medicare committee and issue supporter).

AAMFT members may e-mail their Congresspeople to support Medicare MFT coverage as part of the final reform bill by going to http://capwiz.com/aamft/home/.

Behavioral Health Workforce Funding Faces Challenges in Fiscal 2011 Federal Budget

The current federal budget includes a 32 percent increase compared to 2009 in funding for the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). As one of five MFP grants, the AAMFT allocates its share of these funds to financially support 28 doctoral MFT students who have demonstrated interest in serving ethnic minority Americans through clinical or research careers.

The AAMFT also is active in lobbying Congress to increase funding for other programs for which MFT students, recent graduates and faculty are eligible, including the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and the Health Professions and Nursing Education Act (HPNEA) initiatives. We advocate for these programs in coalition with other behavioral health professional associations, such as the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers. Adequate funding is urgently needed to begin addressing the widespread and growing shortage of healthcare professionals, such as in the mental health field.

However, challenges are ahead for these programs in Fiscal 2011, which begins October 1. Election-year concern about the rapidly growing federal deficit has led President Obama to propose a three-year freeze in spending levels for all these initiatives, while many Congressional conservatives have urged cuts in all non-security, non-entitlement domestic programs.

As a result, it is likely that MFP, NHSC and HPNEA funding in 2011 will be no greater than in 2010, and that only partial-year funding will initially be approved. If Republicans win control of at least one Congressional chamber in November, annualized funding levels starting in February 2011 could be below those for the October-January period.

AAMFT Working with Defense Department to Increase MFTs’ Roles in the Military

The AAMFT is involved with two military initiatives focusing on increasing the number of MFTs providing services to military personnel. The first initiative is for the Army to hire several dozen MFTs as clinicians in its Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), following similar 2008 efforts in which the Army hired 53 MFTs at military hospitals and clinics for a three-year period. The ASAP jobs have been posted in the Job Connection at www.aamft.org/jobconnection.

The second Department-wide initiative affects the Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Army. The primary focus involves expediting the number of qualified clinicians to address service members’ marriage and family issues, such as family separations during deployments and post-deployment stress disorders. Only in the beginning stages, this initiative needs approval by Departmental chain of command when the specifics are detailed. Although the primary focus to date has been on clinicians in the military system itself, the project could also address coverage of services under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), through its TRICARE health insurance plan that covers civilian practitioners’ services. Several AAMFT members and staff are participating in this initiative.

DIVISION ADVOCACY

CONNECTICUT AMENDS SCOPE OF PRACTICE Congratulations to the Connecticut division for successfully passing a bill through the legislature that will amend the scope of practice for MFTs. In April, Senate Bill 428 was amended to add the words “diagnosis” and “treatment” to the Connecticut MFT scope of practice. This legislation also will help allow out-of-state MFTs with at least five years of experience to become licensed in Connecticut. On May 5th, both the Senate and the House passed this very important legislation. Public Act No. 10-117 was enacted into law on May 19th.

KANSAS ACHIEVES BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD RECOGNITION In April, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas plan informed the Kansas Department of Insurance that it would recognize MFTs as eligible providers and that it will allow MFTs to serve as network providers. This change will take effect on October 1, 2010. Recognition of MFTs by Kansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield is a wonderful development for the profession. The division’s hard work in advocating for MFT recognition by third-party payers was certainly a factor in leading to this important victory for the profession.

MARYLAND REMOVES RESTRICTION ON ABILITY OF SOME MFTS TO SERVE AS LICENSURE BOARD MEMBERS The Maryland division succeeded in its efforts to amend the licensure law in order to allow more MFTs to serve as members of the state licensure board. Under current law, many division members who obtained an MFT license in Maryland years ago under the “grandparenting” provision were not eligible to serve on the licensure board. With the division’s support, House Bill 1188 was amended to remove this restriction. This legislation passed both the House and the Senate and on May 20th was signed into law by Governor O’Malley. The law goes into effect on October 1, 2010. Congratulations to the division on this victory for the profession.

MISSOURI LEGISLATURE PASSES MFT ASSOCIATE LICENSURE BILL The Missouri division was successful in its efforts to pass a bill through the legislature that will provide for licensure for associate MFTs. In addition to providing for provisional (associate) licensure for MFTs, this legislation, House Bill 2226, also states that state and local government agencies cannot discriminate between persons licensed as MFTs when recommending services that can be performed by MFTs. House Bill 2226 has passed both the House and Senate. This important legislation has been presented to Governor Jay Nixon for his signature. Congratulations to Missouri on this important accomplishment.

UTAH CREATES A LICENSE FOR MFT ASSOCIATES The Utah division was successful in its efforts to enact a law that will allow for the licensure of associate MFTs. Senate Bill 90 amends the licensure law to replace the certified intern designation for associates to license as an “associate marriage and family therapist.” This important legislation passed both the Senate and the House and on March 26th, Governor Herbert signed SB 90 into law. Congratulations to the Utah division on this significant accomplishment.

VIRGINIA ALLOWS MFTS TO SERVE AS ADMINISTRATORS IN A STATE PROGRAM A bill supported by the Virginia division that will allow MFTs to serve as administrators of a treatment program was enacted into law. Senate Bill 428 allows MFTs who are certified as sex offender treatment providers to act as administrators of state prison-based sex offender treatment programs. This legislation passed the Senate and House, and was signed by Governor McDonnell on April 8th. Congratulations to the Virginia division on this important accomplishment.
advocacy

AAMFT PAC

The AAMFT PAC helps establish Congressional allies and member contributions assist with advancing the profession of marriage and family therapy in the United States. The following are PAC contributors between April 1, 2010 and May 31, 2011.

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September 10, 2010
Nina Grunenberger will present: Gottman’s Seven Principles…How They Might Look In Your Office.

Want to share your work? Academic and/or community scholars from around the country have the opportunity to submit a poster and/or oral presentation for consideration.

For more information email info@alaskafm.org or go to www.AkAMFT.org.