

June 15, 2022

The Honorable Jim Wood  
Chair, Assembly Health Committee  
1020 N St, Room 390  
Sacramento, CA 95814



**Re: SB 1019 (Gonzalez) As Amended on June 13, 2022– SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Wood,

Mental Health America of California (MHAC) is a peer-run organization that has been leading the state in behavioral health public policy and advocacy since 1957. The mission of MHAC is to ensure that people of all ages, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, language, race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, spirituality, religion, age or socioeconomic status who require mental health services and supports are able to live full and productive lives, receive the mental health services and other services that they need, and are not denied any other benefits, services, rights, or opportunities based on their need for mental health services. In accordance with our mission, we strongly support efforts which increase access to behavioral health care for diverse Californians.

MHAC is in strong support of SB 1019 (Gonzalez), which will address both the immediate and long-term mental health needs all Medi-Cal beneficiaries with mental health challenges, and particularly those of Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color.

Mental health care needs for low income Californians have increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with over half of individuals with low incomes who rated their pre-pandemic mental health as “fair or poor” experiencing a worsening of their mental health during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Yet data has shown that access to Medi-Cal mental health services for all beneficiaries occurs at a significantly lower rate than the estimated prevalence of mental health conditions among Medi-Cal beneficiaries<sup>2</sup>. In addition, mental health access rates among Black, Asian and Latinx Medi-Cal Managed Care beneficiaries are significantly lower than the access rates for white beneficiaries, due in part to a lack of awareness about what mental health services are available, and how to access those services. It is imperative that California take meaningful action to ensure that all Medi-Cal beneficiaries who need mental health care are provided with culturally and linguistically appropriate information about how to access that care.

SB 1019 would require Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans (MCMCPs) to conduct annual outreach and education to all Medi-Cal enrollees and primary care physicians regarding the mental health benefits available to enrollees. Outreach and education materials would be required to meet cultural and linguistic appropriateness standards and incorporate best practices in stigma reduction. This will result in increased access to services for all Medi-Cal beneficiaries, but especially those beneficiaries from Communities of Color who have experienced the greatest challenges in accessing mental health care.

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<sup>1</sup> California Health Care Foundation, *Listening to Californians with Low Incomes: How They Experience the Health Care System and What it Means for the Future*, May 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ListeningCaliforniansLowIncome05262021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> California Health Care Foundation, *Mental Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity for Adults in Medi-Cal*, November 2020. P.8 accessed at: <https://www.chcf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/MentalHealthDisparitiesRaceEthnicityAdultsMediCal.pdf>

If you have any questions and or if Mental Health America of California can be of any assistance on this or any other behavioral health bill, please contact me or our Interim Director of Public Policy Karen Vicari at [kvicari@mhaofca.org](mailto:kvicari@mhaofca.org).

In Community,



Heidi L. Strunk  
President & CEO