



COMMITTEE STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Rick Allen (R-GA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Hearing:
"Meeting the Moment: Improving Access to Behavioral and Mental Health Care"
April 15, 2021**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Thank you all for joining us here today for an important discussion about the quality and accessibility of mental and behavioral health services for American workers.

The well-being of America's workers has always been a priority for Committee Republicans. That's why Congress is engaged in on-going efforts to address workers' mental and behavioral health needs, including efforts to improve access to high-quality and innovative treatments and services.

Sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns, this past year has been a very trying one for families across the country. Almost overnight, schools and workplaces closed, upending Americans' lives and creating barriers to key mental health services.

While upsetting, but perhaps not surprising, these events triggered an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression in the United States. In 2020, four in 10 adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, up from one in 10 in 2019. More Americans are struggling with substance use disorder leading to rising overdose death rates.

In response to growing mental health needs, Congress, in a bipartisan manner, increased funding to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration through the CARES Act and 2021 appropriations, which included

additional money for emergency grants for behavioral health services to states and other grantees.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the use of telehealth services, and in response to the increased need, Congress provided additional temporary flexibilities for employers to provide telehealth benefits to more workers. Congress should strongly consider if permanent expansions of telehealth coverage may improve access to quality care, including behavioral health care.

As the Committee of jurisdiction over employer-sponsored health care, Republicans understand that employers want what is best for their employees, which means having the flexibility to provide quality health care and addressing workers' mental and behavioral health needs. Ensuring workers have access to high-quality treatment services is key to maintaining a healthy and successful workforce.

According to a 2020 Congressional Budget Office estimate, 151 million Americans receive health insurance through employer-provided plans which is the largest single source of coverage. Yet, Democrats are seeking to eliminate employer-sponsored health care through their socialist Medicare-for-All scheme, which would force millions of Americans into a one-size-fits-all, government-run system and cost more than \$30 trillion dollars over the next decade.

A 2018 survey by American's Health Insurance Plans reveals that 71 percent of Americans are satisfied with their current employer-provided health coverage. By all metrics, satisfaction with employer health coverage outpaces public support for the Democrat's Medicare-for-All scheme.

Employers around the country continue to make concerted efforts to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of workers through implementation of coordinated care programs, employee wellness programs, use of telehealth services, and additional employee assistance programs, though Democrats will ignore this fact and unjustifiably assume that employers are short-changing their employees.

House Republicans want to empower America's job creators to expand access to quality care and mental health services for workers and their families. While the system can be improved, we also recognize employers are attuned to the needs

of their employees, as I know firsthand. For 37 years, I ran a construction business where we provided staff benefits. I knew my employees' needs and what benefits and services were best suited to meet them. That is why I believe employers play a critical role in enhancing the system moving forward, which will benefit workers by ensuring that effective mental and behavioral health services are offered."

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