



ADVANCING  
BRAIN HEALTH  
POLICY &  
INSPIRING  
LEADERSHIP



March 28, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

Our organizations would like to thank you for your steadfast leadership during the COVID-19 outbreak in California. Combined, we serve more than half a million families, children and individuals in California every year. It is impossible to quantify how significantly these people are impacted by the shelter-in-place orders during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we do know that they have minimal supports and resources that so many of us take for granted. We are especially grateful for your leadership and applaud the actions you have taken to stabilize the safety net programs that agencies across the state provide to those in greatest need.

In addition to the physical health threats posed by COVID-19, many Californians are also facing another crisis: combatting the mental health challenges posed by isolation and reduced access to care during the necessary shelter-in-place order. In the current climate of uncertainty, more than ever, anxiety is flooding people's lives as they worry about loved ones, health, finances, stability and futures. In order to get Californians the physical and mental health care they need during this crisis, **we ask that you utilize your emergency powers to allow California Nurse Practitioners (NPs) to practice without formal physician oversight and to allow hospitals to give NPs admitting privileges.**

As you may know, nurse practitioners in California are currently unable to practice to the full extent of their education and training because of the existing California requirement for physician supervision. This means that if a physician is not available in a community to treat patients, a nurse practitioner can also not treat patients in that community. A subpopulation of the people that we serve require psychiatric medication when clinically appropriate and medication support services. In the public behavioral health system, psychiatrists, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners provide medication support and adjunct services as part of interdisciplinary treatment teams. This is also the case in the hospital and community outpatient clinics throughout our state.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all aware of the significant toll the uncertainty of this pandemic is having on everyone's mental health; particularly those with trauma histories, and those in living situations with minimal supports. However, the behavioral health field already faces a severe shortage of psychiatrists, and these shortages will continue based on recent forecasts from UCSF Healthforce Center. A recent UCSF Healthforce Study found that California will have 50% fewer

psychiatrists than needed by 2028 assuming current service utilization and unmet service need. Put this shortage in the context of today's public health crisis, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that more should not be done to support those in greatest need: whether it's our foster youth, a young immigrant family, or the family of a first responder. A significant strategy that should be utilized to increase behavioral health workforce capacity is to allow nurse practitioners to practice to the full extent of their education and training.

Nurse practitioners are already on the frontlines of this crisis, working in hospitals, clinics and emergency rooms across the state. Primary care and psychiatric NPs can also provide much needed behavioral health care during this time, while freeing up physicians to treat other patients who need care. There are approximately 1,200 psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs) currently practicing in California who are sufficiently trained, qualified and ready to independently serve Californians in the rural, suburban and urban areas in which they practice.

As you well know, during this unprecedented public health crisis, California needs to ensure that as many people have access to care as possible, and that includes access to potentially life-saving behavioral health care. **We respectfully ask that you suspend the current physician supervision requirement and allow nurse practitioners to practice independently. Nurse practitioners in the behavioral health space are ready and willing to help high-need patients across California.**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Shilton, Senior Policy Advocate  
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Cc: Mark Ghaly, MD, MPH, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency  
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