

Opening Statement
Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “High Anxiety and Stress: Legislation to Improve Mental Health During Crisis”
June 30, 2020

In any given year, one in five adults experience a mental illness such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. But 2020 has been a year like no other.

In a recent poll, half of adults report that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to the coronavirus. Imagine the mental impacts on those Americans who are grieving the loss of loved ones to the virus.

The economic downturn is also taking a mental toll on our fellow Americans. Studies found for every 1% increase in the unemployment rate, the suicide rate increases by 1 to 1.6%.

Despite the frequency of mental illness, too many suffer in silence. Mental health is a neglected part of our health care system, with less than 40% of people with mental illness receiving any treatment. This is because of the high cost of care, insufficient insurance coverage, limited options due to poor provider reimbursement, and an antiquated system that too often relies on prisons, jails, and shelters.

We're so fortunate to have former Congressman Patrick Kennedy as a witness today. He has led the way in attacking the stigma of mental health by being open about his own journey and advocating for transformational changes to our mental health system.

He was the author of the 2008 *Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act*, which promised to require health insurers to treat mental health care the same as physical health care. Unfortunately, years after its passage health insurers still deny too many Americans coverage because they don't follow the letter and spirit of the law.

The good news is there are many strong bills to address these issues. Today we're considering 22 bills. There is clearly bipartisan demand to address this crisis.

The legislation we're considering cover the recent increase in suicides, racial disparities in mental health outcomes, telehealth, coverage parity, and access to mental health services in schools.

Several bills also address the mental health issues caused by COVID-19. The pandemic is fueling mental health problems while also hurting the ability of caregivers to deal with the crisis. Mental health programs are struggling to treat an influx of patients while awaiting funding that Congress appropriated, but HHS has been slow to release.

Our health as a nation, both physical and mental, will be tested in the months ahead. Aristotle said, “*Even calamities have a soul and can teach us a wise life.*”

This calamity is teaching us the importance of correcting the wrongs in our society and that there’s hope for recovery for us all.

I yield the remainder of my time to Representative Joe Kennedy who has been a leader on this issue.