

United States Senate

May 09, 2018

VADM R.C. Bono, MC, USN
Director, Defense Health Agency
7700 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 5101
Falls Church, VA 22042-5101

Dear Admiral Bono:

We write out of concerned about proposed discounts to TRICARE reimbursement rates by Humana and Health Net Federal Services (HNFS) for TRICARE mental health providers in our states. These discounts severely impact network adequacy and access to mental health care for highly-stressed military and veteran families in our communities and we require further information from the Defense Health Agency (DHA) so that these problems can be rectified.

Psychologists from both the East and West region report receiving new contracts from Humana that included a 30 percent reduction of Civilian Health And Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) rates that are currently in effect,. These dramatic discounts to already low reimbursement rates have resulted in a number of experienced, long-time TRICARE psychologist providers abandoning the program. In both the short- and long-term, these discounts to reimbursement rates will have a devastating effect on high-quality care for our vulnerable population of military members, veterans, and their families.

TRICARE beneficiaries already have limited options and resources and we fear the large discounts by Humana and HNFS are further deteriorating the networks, leaving our most needy families without the experienced care they deserve. Requiring a beneficiary to change mental health professionals is disruptive, and sometimes untenable, particularly for those undergoing treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder who have developed a relationship with their specialist. TRICARE has a duty to provide appropriate oversight of its contractors and to protect its beneficiaries, especially as new contractors were put in place for both regions in 2018. Substantial numbers of our constituent psychologists report significant problems with Humana and HNFS online billing systems, and difficulty getting representatives to return requests for time-sensitive information.

For those reasons, we request information from DHA about how vendors are communicating with providers about the status and changes under the 2018 agreements. Moreover, it is critical we understand how DHA plans to review the contract selection process to ensure that criteria and cost savings are considered when selecting future vendors to manage the mental health benefit. Finally, we must know how current vendors will be required to demonstrate network adequacy—including the number of providers a beneficiary must call before getting an appointment, how long it takes to get an appointment, how far the beneficiary has to travel for treatment, and how full the array of network providers is currently.

At a time when our nation's military is engaged in conflicts around the globe, it is imperative we provide our military members and their families with the care and service they deserve. We look forward to your prompt response in this matter.

Sincerely,



JON TESTER
U.S. Senator



BILL NELSON
U.S. Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
U.S. Senator