

## AMA advocates for support of physician mental health needs

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The AMA is pushing for legislative, regulatory and health system changes to support the mental health needs of medical students, residents and practicing physicians—including laws to ensure confidentiality for seeking care for burnout, advocacy to urge state medical licensing bodies, and health systems and credentialing bodies to remove questions on their applications that may deter physicians from seeking treatment for a mental illness or substance use disorder and reducing administrative burdens that contribute to physician burnout.

### Why physician wellness is important

Physician burnout poses a major challenge for the U.S. health care workforce and this has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Physician burnout can lead to devastating consequences and requires system-level solutions, as well as initiatives and programs that encourage physicians and medical students to seek help as needed.

The AMA encourages the following advocacy efforts to support medical students, residents and practicing physicians:

- Ensure that state licensing, credentialing, employment and other related applications do not contain stigmatizing language that inappropriately asks about past diagnoses of a mental illness or other condition. Questions should focus on whether there is a current impairment that prevents the ability to safely practice medicine.
- Enact state legislation that provides for safe haven reporting systems and wellness programs for physicians, medical students and other health care professionals to seek care for burnout and other stressors, as well as mental health issues. Medical societies should consider implementing and/or supporting these programs.
- Review state Physician Health Program (PHP) laws and policies to ensure they provide strong confidentiality protections for physicians seeking care.
- Support—and help implement—provisions in the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, which would, among other things, establish a national campaign to encourage health care professionals to prioritize their mental health and to use available mental and behavioral health services, disseminate evidence-based practices for preventing

suicide and improving resiliency among health care professionals and establish grants for hospitals, community health centers, rural health clinics and medical professional societies to establish or enhance mental health improvement programs for health professionals.

For more information, read the AMA's issue brief (PDF).

## Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act

The AMA successfully pressed (PDF) for the enactment of the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, which dedicates resources to support the mental health needs of physicians.

In the Feb. 24, 2022, episode of Moving Medicine, AMA Chief Experience Officer Todd Unger discusses the significance of this act with the co-founder and president of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, J. Corey Feist, JD, MBA.

## State work on physician wellness

The AMA is undertaking a national campaign to urge state medical licensing boards, credentialing authorities and others to ensure that applications for licensure and employment do not stigmatize or penalize those who have received treatment for a mental health issue, counseling for burnout or those who are actively in treatment.

The AMA has worked with a number of states so far to support legislative and other efforts that support medical student and physician mental health and burnout.

- Support for landmark legislation in Virginia that provides for confidentiality protections for medical students and physicians seeking care for burnout and wellness. Similar laws have since been enacted in Arizona, Indiana and South Dakota.
- Advocacy in support of state physician health programs (PHP) at the national and state level to help ensure that physicians receiving care have important confidentiality protections to support their treatment and return to practice. Recent AMA advocacy includes efforts in Colorado, Montana and New Hampshire.
- Advocacy to the Federation of State Medical Boards and state boards in Alaska, Minnesota, Ohio and other states urging changes to questions that ask about “past diagnosis” of a

mental illness rather than focus on whether there is a current impairment.

## State and federal advocacy

- Sign-on letter (PDF) in support of introduction of the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act.
- Sign-on letter (PDF) commending Congress for the enactment of the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act.
- Comment letter (PDF) to the Arizona Senate in support of H.B. 2429, “Physician Wellness Programs.”
- Comment letter to the Indiana Senate in support of Senate Bill 365 “Wellness Programs for Physicians.”
- Comment letter (PDF) to the Delaware Senate in support of Senate Bill 300 to support physician wellness and protect patient safety.
- Comment letter (PDF) to the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) opposing changes to the state PHP that would negatively affect physicians. DORA did not take the action.
- Comment letter (PDF) to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry urging continuity of the Montana PHP to support physicians in treatment. AMA also testified at multiple DLI hearings.
- Comment letter (PDF) to the New Hampshire Executive Council urging the Council to reject efforts that would interfere with the state PHP. The Council took action as recommended by the AMA and New Hampshire Medical Society.

## Webinar on physician wellness

### Healing the healer: Making advocacy personal

In this webinar, J. Corey Feist, JD, MBA, co-founder of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation, discusses the effects that the pandemic and other stressors have had on physicians, and what steps organized medicine and other stakeholders can take now to help physicians get the support and care they need.

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