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Sun Life U.S. calls for mental health parity in disability insurance

Statement from Sun Life U.S. President, Dan Fishbein, M.D., on the ERISA Advisory Council's recommendation to Congress

WELLESLEY, Mass., Dec. 12, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, Dan Fishbein, M.D., president of Sun Life U.S., released the following statement regarding the ERISA Advisory Council's recommendation that Congress pass legislation to require mental health parity in long-term disability insurance.



Sun Life U.S. supports ERISA recommendation to Congress for mental health parity in disability insurance.

"Mental health is health, unequivocally. Just as with physical conditions, mental health conditions can render a person unable to work. Disability insurance offers a level of income protection when someone cannot work due to illness or injury – but by tradition in the U.S. has typically only covered mental health conditions for two years, depending on the policy. The ERISA Advisory Council today has recommended that Congress pass legislation to ensure mental health parity in disability insurance, which is already the case for health insurance. As one of North America's largest disability insurers, we support this important change. Mental health conditions should be covered by long-term disability in the same way that physical conditions are. We encourage Congress to take up and pass appropriate legislation to make this happen.

The obvious question is why disability insurers don't just do this on their own. Any one company introducing this approach without a market-wide solution would immediately be uncompetitive. A legislative solution is therefore the best option, ensuring an equitable approach for all covered workers, while supporting a strong and sustainable market for disability insurance.

Another key issue is the cost impact. While some have expressed concerns that employers won't be able to afford the added cost of full mental health coverage and will stop offering disability insurance to their employees as a result, we don't believe this will be the case. Employers rightly recognize disability insurance as a valuable employee benefit that workers expect and rely on. If all disability carriers provided mental health parity, the additional cost would be relatively modest. Plus, disability insurers bring significant resources to manage the cost, especially by helping people get back to health and back to work.

There is a mental health crisis in America. Benefits designed 75 years ago and continued as a market tradition do not reflect today's reality. We encourage others to join us in supporting efforts to evolve disability coverage to meet the current needs of American workers. We must do the right thing and ensure we are covering the conditions that need to be covered, so that workers can get the support and assistance they need. Getting people back to health and back to work whenever possible remains the goal, and providing good mental health benefits to bridge people through times when they can't work is a good investment.

We applaud the ERISA Advisory Council's recommendation and stand ready to work with members of Congress and other partners to support appropriate legislation. Society benefits by helping more workers get the mental healthcare they need, and Congress and the industry have the opportunity to do just that."

About Sun Life

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Sun Life Financial Inc. trades on the Toronto (TSX), New York (NYSE) and Philippine (PSE) stock exchanges under the ticker symbol SLF.

Sun Life U.S. is one of the largest providers of employee and government benefits, helping more than 50 million Americans access the healthcare and coverage they need. Through employers, industry partners and government programs, Sun Life U.S. offers a portfolio of benefits and services, including dental, vision, disability, absence management, life, supplemental health, medical stop-loss insurance, and healthcare navigation. Sun Life employs nearly 8,300 people in the U.S., including associates in our partner dental practices and affiliated companies in asset management. Group insurance policies are issued by Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada (Wellesley Hills, Mass.), except in New York, where policies are issued by Sun Life and Health Insurance Company (U.S.) (Lansing, Mich.). For more information visit our [website](#) and [newsroom](#).

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