

UNIFIED PARKINSON'S ADVOCACY COUNCIL

American Parkinson Disease Association

Brian Grant Foundation

Dallas Area Parkinsonism Society

Davis Phinney Foundation

Friends of Parkinson's

Hawai'i Parkinson Association

Houston Area Parkinson Society

The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

Michigan Parkinson Foundation

Northwest Parkinson's Foundation

Parkinson Alliance

Parkinson Association of Alabama

Parkinson Association of Central Florida

Parkinson Association of Northern California

Parkinson Association of the Rockies

Parkinson's Foundation

Parkinson's Resources of Oregon

Parkinson's Unity Walk

Parkinson & Movement Disorder Alliance

Parkinson Voice Project

Power for Parkinson's

Wilkins Parkinson's Foundation

Wisconsin Parkinson Association

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy,

As Congress takes action to advance legislation in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Unified Parkinson's Advocacy Council (UPAC) urges you to include H.R.945/S.286, the *Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2019* in an upcoming response package. The UPAC is led by The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research and comprises representatives from the leading national, regional, and state Parkinson's organizations. We gather field-wide input on public policy issues impacting the Parkinson's community and work to shape policies that support patients, caregivers, and researchers. It is estimated that 1 million people in United States have Parkinson's disease (PD), and it has an estimated economic burden of \$52 billion.

Parkinson's disease is a chronic neurodegenerative disease that gradually worsens over time. Currently there is no treatment to stop, slow, or reverse the progression of the disease, nor is there a cure. The UPAC supports public policies and evidence-based actions that protect access to affordable health care services, meet patients' needs, and improve patients' quality of life. For PD patients, mood disorders such as anxiety

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and depression, are often debilitating clinical symptoms that profoundly impact patients' health, quality of life, and independence. At least half of all PD patients suffer from clinical depression during their disease.

Approximately 90% of PD patients receive health care coverage through Medicare. *The Mental Health Access Improve Act of 2019* takes a critical step in addressing the pervasive shortage of mental health providers throughout the United States by providing coverage for both marriage and family therapist services, as well as licensed mental health counselor services under Medicare. Depression in patients with PD often impact long-term outcomes and, in fact, may manifest prior to the motor symptoms typically associated with the disease. Fortunately, depression and anxiety in patients with PD can be effectively treated through adequate access to therapy and counseling.

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented public health emergency. The UPAC urges you to continue your commitment to the health of Americans with chronic diseases that need access to health care services. If you have any questions you may contact Aaron Polacek at apolacek@michaeljfox.org or by phone at 202-638-4101 ext. 252.

Sincerely,

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THE UNIFIED PARKINSON'S ADVOCACY COUNCIL (UPAC) IS MANAGED BY
THE MICHAEL J. FOX FOUNDATION FOR PARKINSON'S RESEARCH
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