

Caring for Our Frontline Health Care Professionals

COVID-19 is an unprecedented modern public health crisis, and beyond the loss of life and physical health concerns this global pandemic brings, its sheer scope and overall scale have also taken a toll on the mental health and well-being of those who have been selflessly providing care over the past year.

For most physicians and other clinicians, seeking treatment for mental health sparks legitimate fear of resultant loss of licensure (some state licensing boards continue to ask questions about clinicians' mental health histories or past treatment), loss of income, or other career setbacks due to ongoing stigma. Such fears have deterred them from accessing necessary mental health care, leaving many with no better option than to suffer in silence.

"I felt concerned that my job would be in jeopardy or others would question my ability to do my job."

--Emergency physician quoted in a 2020 ACEP/Morning Consult poll

Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act

To ensure patient access to medically necessary care can be maintained, it is vital that we work to preserve and protect the health of our medical workforce.

Named after an emergency physician director of a New York emergency department [who died by suicide in April 2020](#) following weeks of caring for the onslaught of COVID-19 patients during the city's case peak, the "**Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act**" (**S. 610/H.R. 1667**):

- Establishes grants for training health profession students, residents, or health care professionals in evidence-informed strategies to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout, mental health conditions, and substance use disorders.
- Seeks to identify and disseminate evidence-informed best practices for reducing and preventing suicide and burnout among health care professionals.
- Establishes a national evidence-based education and awareness campaign targeting health care professionals to encourage them to seek support and treatment.
- Establishes grants for employee education, peer-support programming, and mental and behavioral health treatment with a focus on health care providers in current or former COVID-19 hotspots.
- Commissions a federal study into health care professional mental health and burnout and barriers to seeking appropriate care, with special examination of COVID-19's impact.

"There are questions on medical license applications about if you've ever been treated for mental health. I don't want to be perceived as unfit for duty."

--Emergency physician quoted in a 2020 ACEP/Morning Consult poll

Overcoming Stigma

Overall, physicians have a [significantly higher risk](#) of dying by suicide than the public. Based on [a recent survey](#), over 20 percent of physicians report having thoughts of suicide at some point in their lives, and approximately 2 percent have attempted it. Stigma surrounding mental illness is a well-known barrier to seeking care among the general population, but it can have an even stronger impact among health care professionals. A recent [Morning Consult/ACEP poll](#) found that 73 percent of emergency physicians feel there is stigma in their workplace when it comes to mental health treatment, and 57 percent would be concerned for their job were they to seek it.

Ensuring clinicians can freely seek mental health treatment and services without fear of professional setback means such issues can be resolved, rather than hidden away and suffered through. Furthermore, optimal clinician mental health is essential to ensuring that patients have a strong and capable health care workforce to provide the care they need.

The undersigned therefore urge lawmakers to co-sponsor the
Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act (S.610/H.R. 1667)

American College of Emergency Physicians
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Neurology
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Clinical Urologists
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Cardiology
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Radiology
American College of Rheumatology
American College of Surgeons
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Gastroenterological Association
American Medical Association
American Medical Group Association
American Nurses Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society of Anesthesiologists
Association for Clinical Oncology
Association of American Medical Colleges
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation
Emergency Nurses Association
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Spine Specialists
Physicians Advocacy Institute
Renal Physicians Association
Society for Vascular Surgery
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons