

NAADAC's Advocacy Goes Virtual in 2020

By Julie Shroyer, MSW, Senior Policy Advisor, Polsinelli, Robert Daley, Legislative Director, Polsinelli, and Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, NAADAC Executive Director

NAADAC's Advocacy in Action conferences provide tremendous visibility for the addiction profession on Capitol Hill and the opportunity to advocate for specific NAADAC initiatives that affect the work that we do on a day-to-day basis. Although COVID-19 has limited travel to Washington, DC, in 2020, it did not stop NAADAC members from advocating virtually on October 7. In fact, we were able to increase our participation significantly. During this year's event over 550 addiction professionals from across the country representing all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, participated in virtual advocacy meetings with lawmakers and their staffs. Our advocates took time out of their busy schedules to join together and educate Congress on critical issues impacting the addiction profession and the clients we serve.

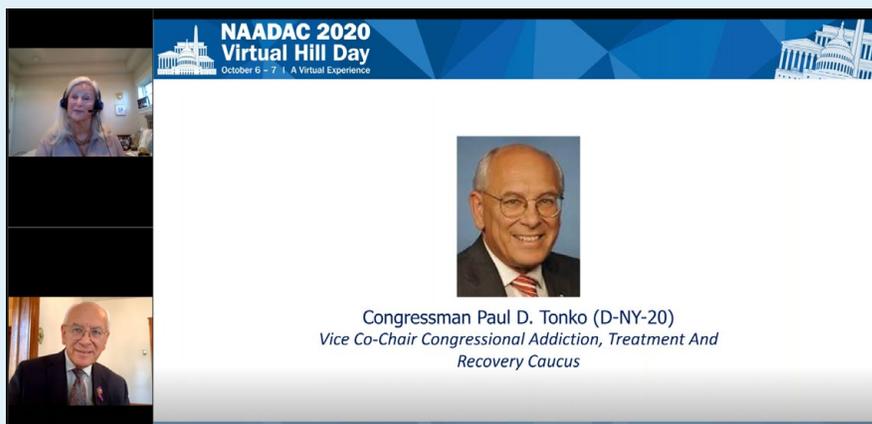
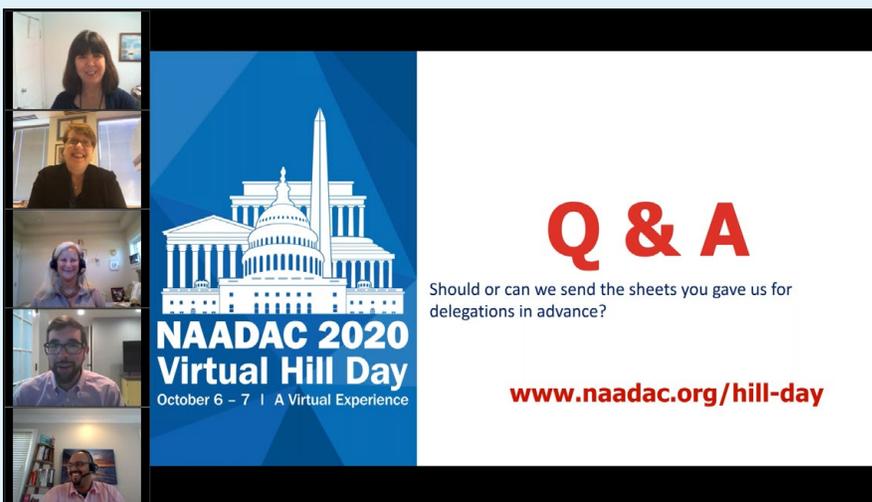
On October 6, NAADAC hosted a two-hour advocacy training session in which Congressman Paul Tonko from New York's 20th District helped kick-off NAADAC's first ever Virtual Hill Day. Congressman Tonko is a member of the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee and serves as Vice-Chair for the Congressional Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus. The Congressman is a true champion for addiction and mental health issues; he has sponsored numerous bills aimed at reducing barriers to substance use disorder treatment, mainstreaming addiction treatment, and has fought for emergency funding for addiction treatment providers during the pandemic. He was also an original sponsor of last year's House resolution (H.Res. 419) supporting the delivery of evidence-based care for substance use disorder by acknowledging the contributions of addiction professionals and encouraging that recognized credentials reflect the knowledge, training, and competencies for delivering quality, effective substance use disorder counseling and national credentials. Congressman Tonko was awarded the NAADAC Legislator of the Year Award in March 2012 for his past effort, and he promises to continue his work for the addiction profession and the individuals and families that we serve.

During the October 6th briefing, Congressman Tonko spoke about Congress' ongoing work to provide more resources to fight addiction. He highlighted the important role that addiction professionals play in helping shape federal policy in the halls of Congress. He focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on individuals struggling with substance use disorder and acknowledged that reports of increased overdoses are threatening to reverse the progress made when Congress passed comprehensive addiction legislation in 2016 and 2018. Congressman Tonko further discussed the leadership role he has taken

this year to fight for additional economic relief and substance use disorder funding to help addiction professionals provide care for their clients during such a difficult time. In his closing remarks, Congressman Tonko said that now is the time for Congress and stakeholders to be "loud and bold" as we work together to address the impacts of addiction. He inspired our members to maximize their visits with federal legislators and let us know that he will continue to fight for our shared priorities.

NAADAC's advocacy team of Julie Shroyer and Rob Daley from Polsinelli, NAADAC Executive Director Cynthia Moreno Tuohy and Public Policy Committee Co-Chairs Sherri Layton and Michael Kemp also provided participants with a federal update and an overview of NAADAC's 2020 priorities, and shared insights and tips on how to build lasting relationships with lawmakers on issues that impact the addiction profession. This two-hour briefing was recorded and is available on-demand on the NAADAC website.

On October 7, NAADAC members and constituents began meeting virtually with their respective House and Senate lawmakers. As over 45



virtual meetings took place across the country, advocates emphasized the importance of supporting the addiction workforce by urging Congress to provide additional COVID-19 relief for infrastructure support, updating substance use disorder parity laws to include more consequences for insurers not following the parity laws, and addressing the importance of national credentials, especially as telehealth has increased so dramatically due to COVID.

Our members are well aware that America faces a dramatic treatment gap. According to SAMHSA's 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, only about one in 10 of the 20.4 million Americans with substance use disorders in 2019 received any form of treatment. These numbers are staggering and illustrate the clear demand for increased access to services. The COVID-19 pandemic has also expanded this treatment gap. Reports are showing increases in substance use, along with increases in overdose related deaths.

This year's advocates focused on educating lawmakers about this growing treatment gap. We highlighted the need for additional investments in the addiction workforce and treatment infrastructure. NAADAC members encouraged Congress to pass an economic relief package that includes at least \$8.5 billion in emergency funding for addiction and mental health treatment and recovery programs, along with legislation to improve access to telehealth and establish a Mental Health and Addiction Assistance Network to help individuals manage substance use disorders during the pandemic.

Our visits were also timely since Congress is in the process of negotiating a fiscal 2021 budget. In addition to requesting emergency funding to support COVID-19 response efforts, our advocates encouraged Congress to provide a \$500 million increase for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant. This grant program provides infrastructure support for public funded facilities. We also continued to request that Congress provide the full \$25 million that was authorized for the Loan Repayment Program for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce and \$15.7 million for the Minority Fellowship Program. These programs help provide incentives for students to pursue careers in the addiction profession.

NAADAC is also supporting efforts to strengthen substance use disorder and mental health parity laws at the federal level. While current laws, regulations, and guidance require insurers to treat substance use disorder and mental health the same way they treat medical or physical illness, the lack of enforcement has led to significant gaps in coverage for millions of Americans with these issues. Representatives Joe Kennedy (D-MA) and Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) introduced the *Strengthening Behavioral Health Parity Act* (H.R. 7539) to strengthen existing parity laws. This legislation was approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee in July 2020. NAADAC members called on House and Senate leaders to commit to considering this bill or similar parity legislation that's been introduced in the Senate before the end of the year. Congressional support for strengthening behavioral health parity is an important step in the right direction toward helping addiction professionals build momentum for more comprehensive substance use disorder parity enforcement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the advancement of telehealth as an acceptable form of assessment and treatment, so it is more important than ever that we have standardized credentials that are able to cross state boundaries and offer the support that a mobile society of people in recovery needs to have in their lives. Addiction professional



NAADAC 2020 Virtual Hill Day

October 6 – 7 | A Virtual Experience

licensure and credentialing requirements vary greatly from state to state and serve as a barrier to entry, advancement, and retention for this key segment of the workforce. This year, we continued to encourage Congress to work with NAADAC and other stakeholders in the addiction workforce to support national credentials that have been developed to ensure standardized training and education requirements are utilized to educate, train, and credential the next generation of addiction professionals and to expand recognition by the public.

While we were not able to meet in person for this year's Hill Day, NAADAC's virtual advocacy helps to continue elevating the voice of the addiction profession with lawmakers. In May, NAADAC also launched its 2020 Advocacy Webinar Series that includes presentations on shaping policy, substance use disorder funding, bolstering the addiction workforce, confidentiality rules, and grassroots advocacy. We encourage you to visit the Advocacy webpages on the NAADAC website to view past presentations and sign up for future events.

There is no question that it is an important time for our profession and for our nation. Our elected representatives in Washington, DC, are supporting our profession and the clients we serve. Please stay tuned as we provide updates on these important developments, and be sure to share any feedback you receive from your lawmakers with NAADAC. We look forward to working with you to build on these successes going forward and to continue positively shaping federal policies impacting you and your clients.



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and has worked as an addiction professional for over 35 years. She has been a trainer in Domestic Violence/Anger Management and Conflict Resolution for over 25 years as well as an international, national and state trainer in a variety of topics. Moreno Tuohy is also a curriculum writer in addiction screening and evaluation, counseling methods, conflict resolution, co-occurring disorders, and medicated assisted treatment and recovery, and has written articles published in national and other trade magazines. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and is certified both nationally and in the State of Washington.



Julie Shroyer, MSW, is Senior Policy Advisor in the Washington, DC, office of Polsinelli, a national law and public policy firm. She has more than 30 years of federal health policy experience, including service on Capitol Hill as committee staff and in senior positions in both the non-profit and private sector. A respected advisor to congressional and presidential campaigns, she is sought after for her recognized expertise in health care and public policy. Shroyer serves on the Board of Directors of House of Ruth, a DC-based non-profit organization that empowers women, children, and families to rebuild their lives and heal from trauma, abuse, and homelessness. She graduated from Western Michigan University with a Bachelor's degree in social work and earned a Master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan.



Robert Daley is a Legislative Director in the Washington, DC, office of Polsinelli, a national law and public policy firm. He has over a decade of public policy experience, including serving as an aide to Members of Congress. Daley works with a wide range of health care clients to develop legislative strategies, craft policy solutions and represent their interests before policymakers in Washington. He helps clients navigate and understand changing political and legislative dynamics to appropriately adjust their advocacy efforts to meet their goals. He has worked to secured favorable client outcomes on federal appropriations, as well as legislation to modernize Medicare reimbursements, and reduce opioid prescribing. He is a graduate of American University in Washington, DC.