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Statement by Lora Pellegrini, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Association of Health Plans, on the Health Policy Commission’s Behavioral Health Workforce Center Recommendations

May 7, 2026

“The Massachusetts Association of Health plans strongly support efforts to expand access to high quality behavioral health services and strengthen the workforce. However, proposals that rely primarily on rate increases, without aligning those increases with broader system reforms, risk driving up overall health care costs and placing additional pressure on premiums for Massachusetts residents and employers.

Importantly, increasing rates alone does not guarantee improved access, particularly where a significant portion of behavioral health providers do not participate in insurance networks and instead operate on a cash-pay basis.

Absent meaningful action to address the core drivers of cost growth, including high hospital prices, rising prescription drug costs, and increased utilization of high-cost care settings, mandatory rate increases will not reduce total system costs. Instead, they will shift those costs into premiums, further exacerbating affordability challenges across the Commonwealth.

Sustainable improvements in behavioral health access require a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach. This includes strengthening prevention and upstream interventions, advancing integrated, team-based models of care; implementing innovative value-based payment models that support workforce stability; and promoting accountability for access, quality, and outcomes.

MAHP member health plans have played a critical role in expanding access to behavioral health services through care coordination, network development, and innovative payment strategies. Improving access and maintaining affordability must go hand in hand. It is critical for the commonwealth to advance solutions that achieve both goals.”

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