



May 6, 2025

Honorable Mia Bonta
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
1020 N Street, Room 390
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Bonta:

Thank you for the invitation to participate in your informational hearing on May 6th. Kaiser Permanente will not be participating out of concern for NUHW's role in the discussion. While we are very pleased to have reached a tentative agreement in our Southern California contract negotiations and the union has ended their open-ended strike, we remain concerned.

We do want to provide you and the members of the committee with current and accurate information about our behavioral health care. We appreciate the conversations we have had with you and your staff to provide information about our care, our access, and our commitment to improve.

There is a mental health care crisis in America. The need for mental health care in America has never been greater, and at the same time harder to deliver. Across the United States, mental health experts have reported the demand for mental health services has increased as much as 30% since the beginning of the pandemic. Positive efforts to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health care have also increased demand.

We believe everyone should be able to get mental health care when they need it. We remain committed to transforming the quality and outcomes for patients receiving mental health care in California. While more work remains, we have made significant progress. Over the last several years, we have been working to build a better model of behavioral health care, leveraging the power of our integrated system and the expertise of our physicians and therapists to deliver high quality mental health and addition medicine services as an equal and essential part of a person's overall health care. We are proud to report:

- Any Kaiser Permanente member who needs an appointment is able to get timely, high-quality, clinically appropriate care.
- We have invested more than \$1 billion since 2020 to expand our mental health capabilities in California, adding treatment spaces and expanding our behavioral health care provider network.
- We have increased our available behavioral health care providers to more than 30,000 professionals to ensure that patients have timely access to mental health care. This includes our internal and external network of providers.
- Currently, Kaiser Permanente members receive non-urgent appointments on average within 6 days, which is better than the state's requirement.
- Kaiser Permanente patients with urgent needs can get appointments within 48 hours, and we have staff available for anyone in crisis to get care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Even during the NUHW strike in Southern California, which ended yesterday, we successfully accommodated a 10 percent increase in visits booked over the same period last year, thanks in large part to our high-quality external provider network.

Kaiser Permanente is consistently recognized for our high-quality mental health care. The California Office of the Patient Advocate has rated our behavioral health and mental health care plans the best in California for five years in a row. Southern California is also rated highest for behavioral health care coordination and behavioral health access, monitoring, and safety, according to the 2024 NCQA Report Card.

But as you know, in the past we fell short of providing our high-quality, evidence-based care in a way that is timely, convenient, and easy to navigate. Therefore, in accordance with our October 2023 Settlement Agreement with the Department of Managed Health Care, Kaiser Permanente developed and has been implementing a comprehensive strategy to transform our behavioral health care delivery system to improve members' care experience and our operations, processes, and procedures to better assist members with accessing care. As reported to the DMHC in our recent quarterly review, we have made incredible strides in these key areas:

- Streamlining and improving members' access to behavioral health care services and our network of internal and external providers,
- Refining our grievance and appeals process to support timely adjudication of complaints,
- Ensuring our coverage of behavioral health care services remains compliant with evolving behavioral health care laws and regulations, including state and federal parity laws,
- Conducting an end-to-end review and analysis of how members access and traverse behavioral health care to identify and address barriers, inefficiencies, and gaps in care that impact outcomes and member experience, and
- Enhancing our quality assurance program and oversight of services provided by our providers.

Bottom line: today we offer our members more choice and access than ever before, and we meet state requirements for access to behavioral health care. While we have more work to do, we are proud of our behavioral health care and our progress in recent years. We remain committed to transforming the way behavioral health care is delivered in California, focusing on delivering evidence-based care that is convenient and easy to navigate.

Thank you for your interest in Kaiser Permanente's behavioral health care system.

Sincerely,



Simon Borger, LCSW
Senior Vice President, National Mental Health, Wellness & Addiction Care
Kaiser Permanente

cc: Members, Assembly Health Committee