



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
FAMILY PHYSICIANS  
STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

January 15, 2015

William F. Russo, Acting Director  
Office of Regulation Policy & Management  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave. NW, Room 1068  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Director Russo:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents 115,900 family physicians and medical students across the country, I am responding to the [proposed rule](#) titled, "Exempting Mental Health Peer Support Services From Copayments," published by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the November 28, 2014 *Federal Register*.

The AAFP supports the VA proposal to exempt mental health peer support services from having any required copayment for inpatient hospital care or outpatient medical care. We concur that this exemption removes a barrier that may have previously discouraged veterans from choosing to use mental health peer support services as a viable care option.

It is the AAFP's [policy](#) to support parity of health insurance coverage for patients, regardless of medical or mental health diagnosis. Health care plans should cover mental health care under the same terms and conditions as that provided for other medical care. Family physicians have traditionally focused on treating the whole patient, and recognize the mind, body and spirit connection. Promotion of mental health and diagnosis and treatment of mental illness in the individual and family context are integral components of family medicine.

In the spirit of removing barriers that discourage the utilization of important health care services, the AAFP urges the VA to also exempt evidence-based, cost-effective primary care services from having any required copayment. Doing so would greatly improve access to veterans that do not qualify for free healthcare service.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and make ourselves available for any questions you might have. Please contact Robert Bennett, Federal Regulatory Manager, at 202-232-9033 or [rbennett@aafp.org](mailto:rbennett@aafp.org).

Sincerely,

Reid B. Blackwelder, MD, FFAFP  
Board Chair

[www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)

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