Increasing Access to Behavioral Health Services: Opportunities at the State and Federal Level

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States play a critical role in behavioral health care delivery, leveraging Medicaid innovations and federal grants to build a safety net. However, the system faces challenges, including fragmentation, rising mental health issues among children, and an escalating overdose crisis. Federal and state alignment is essential to modernize systems and improve access to high-quality care.

Key considerations include:

1. **Federal Inter-Agency Alignment:** Streamline grant programs, align funding and reporting requirements, and support cross-agency collaboration for integrated, evidence-based care.
2. **Children and Youth Behavioral Health:** Focus on prevention, early intervention, and integrated care. Recommendations include increasing Medicaid funding for pediatric care, expanding community-based services, and improving guidance for schools and states on mental health reimbursement and data sharing.
3. **Integrated and Community-Based Care:** Support physical and behavioral health integration through models like Collaborative Care, with enhanced funding for home- and community-based services. Provide technical assistance and guidance to advance these models and address workforce capacity issues.
4. **Behavioral Health Parity Enforcement:** Enhance state tools to ensure equitable mental health coverage, such as aligning emergency behavioral health services with federal parity laws and addressing gaps in federal oversight.
5. **Behavioral Health Workforce and Telehealth:** Address workforce shortages by supporting culturally competent, evidence-based care delivery. Sustain telehealth and consultative models (e.g., Project ECHO) through flexible funding and quality standards.

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