

**An Open Letter to Kaiser Permanente from Elected Officials,  
Healthcare Advocates, Clergy, and Community Leaders:**

# **We Stand with Kaiser Therapists in Their Fight To Improve Kaiser's Behavioral Health Care!**

**We stand with Kaiser Permanente's 4,000 behavioral health clinicians** in their long struggle to make Kaiser provide the same timely and appropriate care for mental health and substance use disorders as it does for all other medical conditions.

**We are aware of too many Kaiser members whose lives were irreparably harmed or even lost because they could not get the same level of care for their behavioral health condition as they would for cancer or diabetes.** Yet despite multiple clinician strikes, a record state fine, class action lawsuits, and ongoing prosecution for allegedly misrepresenting the size of its clinician network, Kaiser is making many patients wait longer for behavioral health care than at any point in the last decade.

**Kaiser's own scheduling system shows that patients are waiting as long as three months between their initial assessment and their first therapy session.** With clinician caseloads growing to even more unsustainable levels during the pandemic, 80 percent of Kaiser therapists surveyed recently said their understaffed clinics cannot provide patients timely and appropriate care. Overall, 55 percent said they had considered leaving Kaiser in the past year.

**We believe there are enough clinicians in California for Kaiser to meet the behavioral health needs of its patients,** and that Kaiser must start providing the working conditions and job standards necessary to recruit and retain a sufficient and stable behavioral health workforce.

**As the largest HMO in California — one that reported a \$6.4 billion profit in 2020 and has \$39 billion in reserves — Kaiser has the responsibility and the resources to lead the way in achieving parity for behavioral health care.** But it cannot be a leader without the support and partnership of its psychologists, therapists, social workers, and psychiatric nurses. That's why we call on Kaiser to agree to the following patient care standards these clinicians have proposed for inclusion in their contracts. These standards are simple and necessary for Kaiser to provide behavioral health care that is clinically appropriate and fully in accordance with state law.

- **SUFFICIENT STAFFING TO PROVIDE TIMELY CARE:** Kaiser must hire enough clinicians so it can offer behavioral health patients follow-up appointments within 10 business days — the same timely access standard recently passed by the California State Legislature and awaiting Governor Newsom's signature.
- **ADEQUATE TIME TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE CARE:** High-quality behavioral health care requires more than just face-to-face therapy. To improve patient care, clinicians must have at least six hours per week available to do charting, develop tailored treatment plans, return phone calls and emails from patients in distress, and ensure patients are receiving the help beyond Kaiser they need to support their recovery.
- **CLINICIAN-DIRECTED CARE:** Kaiser clinicians must be able to determine and direct the appropriate course of care for patients without hindrance from Kaiser's administrative and data collection systems, which restrict their ability to document when patients are being made to wait longer than is clinically appropriate between therapy sessions.

I endorse the foregoing statement and authorize NUHW to use my name and signature in public communications in connection therewith.

**NAME**

**TITLE**

**ORGANIZATION**

**SIGNATURE**

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