

Advocacy 2023- Key Points

What is MAMFT advocating for?

- **Pay Parity:** We are seeking to ensure equity in the reimbursement Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) receive for Family Therapy services. Currently, Family Therapy is valued and compensated at a lower rate than Individual Therapy sessions by MDH and many other insurance companies.
 - a. *Example:* Medical Assistance in MN pays \$130.71 for Individual Psychotherapy 53+ minutes (billing code 90837) and only \$70.01 for family therapy (billing codes 90846 and 90847)This makes no sense given that Family Therapy is a specialty service. MFTs are the only licensed professionals who must prove experience and competency in relational counseling in order to obtain their licensure.
 - b. *Details of MFT specialized training:* MFTs must complete a formal education that includes training on systemic theory and relational therapy models. That training must include a 300 hour practicum, where trainees must provide at least 150 hours of relational therapy. After completing their formal education, MFTs must complete an additional 1,000 hours of supervised practice where 500 of those hours must be relational therapy.
- **Protecting our scope of practice:** Family Therapists, the Marriage and Family Therapy licensing Board and professional organizations who represent MFTs should decide what Family Therapy is, NOT insurance companies. Some insurance companies have started to deny claims for Family Therapy services if the identified client is not a minor. Family Therapy is beneficial to clients and communities with families of all types.

Why are these issues important?

Family Therapy (FT) is a systemic modality, which it's particularly relevant when working with minoritized populations. FT is also more culturally attuned for many people who belong to cultures where healing is best supported by a relational approach. Family therapists are relational healers and are an essential part of the mental health field.

If insurance reimburses less than for individual therapy, there are two possible consequences:

- Family therapists will become less likely to contract and credential with insurance companies. Family therapists may instead opt to develop private pay practices, which are cost prohibitive to many people seeking family therapy.
- Fewer people will go into the field of family therapy in favor of fields such as social work and mental health counseling.
 - While these other professions are important in the field of mental health, they have different roots and a different scope of practice than family therapy does.

If fewer people become licensed family therapists and fewer still accept insurance, including medical assistance, this will limit access to affordable family therapy. This is detrimental to families and communities who are historically most marginalized, and are underserved by mental health services providers. Family therapy is at risk of becoming a 'privilege' for those with higher socioeconomic status instead of being an essential mental health service for all our families and communities.

And if insurance companies continue to define Family Therapy as ONLY involving a minor, a large number of families could lose access to essential mental health support. A family doesn't cease to be a family once their eldest child turns 18.

Here are a few examples of families who could lose access to Family Therapy services if insurance companies deny Family Therapy to a family unit that does not contain a minor:

- A family whose child turns 18 during the course of treatment
- Parents/Families who lost a child
- Couples who want to address relational issues or parenting struggles
- Adult family members working to support their aging or ailing parents.
- Family units working to support a family member dealing with addiction
- Premarital couples wanting to build a strong foundation in marriage
- Adult family members experiencing conflict, loss, or trauma.

How do I talk about these issues with my elected officials?

12 Tips for Meeting with Your Legislator

1. Be prepared. Learn about your legislators' committee assignments and think about how your issue relates to their priorities. (MAMFT Staff and contract lobbyists can help provide this information, upon request). Find your representatives online. <https://www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts/>
2. Have your topic and key messages ready. Two to three key points are all you need. Don't try to cover everything and avoid jargon and acronyms.
3. Practice your "elevator speech." In 30 seconds or less, what are you supporting and why?
4. Make a local connection. Stress how the issue will affect your legislator's district and share a story that highlights your experience with the issue and why you care about it.
5. Share materials based on your discussion. Either before or after your meeting, share a brief fact sheet, position paper or other materials.
6. Mention coalition members. Mention any other organizations, important individuals, government officials, and/or legislators that support your position.
7. Be a good listener. After you present your position, allow the legislator to respond. Be prepared to refocus the conversation if they get off track.
8. Stay positive. Your legislator may disagree with your position. If so, don't become combative or argue. Stay positive and keep lines of communication open for the future.

9. Become a resource. Let them know your expertise and share contact information with them. Legislators and their staff welcome a constituent who is knowledgeable on specific issues.
10. Expect to be asked questions. If you don't know an answer, say so and tell them you'll get back to them with more information.
11. Thank the legislator. Always thank the legislator for his/her time at the end of the meeting, even if he or she did not agree with your position. If your meeting went well, invite him/her to visit your local health department to see you and your staff in action.
12. Follow up with a prompt thank you. In your note, reiterate key points and any commitments the legislator made to you. Include all follow-up information you promised to provide.