

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Reid:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing to express our vigorous support for your efforts to pass health care reform legislation. Our coalition hailed the bills approved by both houses last year, including the improvements to access, quality and services provided in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590). We ask you to advance the mental and behavioral health needs of our nation as reform legislation moves through Congress.

As you may know, mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the United States for people ages 15 to 44. Tragically, adults with serious mental illnesses served in public mental health systems typically die 25 years earlier than the general population because of a high rate of preventable co-occurring physical illnesses, such as diabetes or heart disease. These troubling statistics remind us of the importance of the following provisions included in H.R. 3590 that will help millions of children and adults with mental disorders.

- Health insurance market reforms that would prohibit pre-existing conditions exclusions and annual or lifetime limits, provide guaranteed issue and renewal requirements, and allow dependent young adults to remain on parental coverage to age 26;
- Essential plan benefits that include mandatory mental health, substance use, rehabilitation, habilitation, prescription drug and preventive services;
- Mental health and substance use parity requirement for exchange plans;
- Within the private health care system, integrating mental health into primary care with the establishment of interprofessional, interdisciplinary health teams to support primary care practices;
- Medicaid eligibility extension to individuals up to 133% of the federal poverty level, including childless single adults;
- Chronic care coordination fostered through a Medicaid state plan option allowing beneficiaries with one or more chronic conditions or serious mental illnesses to designate a health home, and permitting the designation of a community mental health center as an eligible health home;
- Children's Health Insurance Program maintenance through 2019, with states continuing to provide services or offering a procedure to provide for coverage through the exchange;
- Long-term services coverage through the new Community Living Assistance Services and Supports national insurance program and Community First Choice Medicaid Option to help individuals with disabilities receive essential care at home or in the community;

- Workforce development through mental health and behavioral health education and training grants to assist providers specializing in and providing services to children, adolescents and adults and loan forgiveness to child mental health professionals;
- Prevention and wellness services through community transformation grants and enhanced services for special populations, including people with disabilities; ensuring that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is consulted on the development of strategies pertaining to behavioral health and directing the Clinical Preventive Services Task Force to consider best practices presented by scientific societies in the development of clinical preventive recommendations;
- Strengthening Medicare through an extension restoring reimbursement cuts for psychotherapy services within the outpatient mental health benefit and requiring Part D plans to provide full coverage of six classes of clinically sensitive medications, including anti-depressants, anti-psychotics and anti-convulsants;
- Establishment of a National Center for Excellence in Depression, among other important provisions.

We thank you once again for all you have done for children and adults with mental health disorders through your health care reform efforts thus far.

Sincerely,