

Mental Health Liaison Group

August 3, 2010

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families and communities, the undersigned organizations write today in strong support for the Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010, a bill you are introducing to extend the meaningful use incentives established through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to mental health and substance abuse providers and facilities.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides \$20 billion in incentives and grants to health care providers and hospitals to establish interoperable electronic health record (EHR) systems throughout the nation. These benefits are extended to most physicians, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, podiatrists and most hospitals. However, an important sector of the health care community is excluded – clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric hospitals, substance use treatment facilities and mental health treatment facilities.

The ultimate goal of widespread adoption of health information technology – to save American lives through improved coordination of care – is particularly relevant to persons with mental and addictive disorders. Recent studies have revealed that persons with serious mental illness die sooner than other Americans, and have an average age of death at 52. Health information technology (HIT) is the essential cornerstone of efforts to address this emerging public health crisis. HIT will enable behavioral health and substance abuse providers to effectively coordinate care across mental health and substance abuse service systems, primary care entities, and specialty medicine.

The Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010 would make important changes to Medicare and Medicaid to ensure that the incentives provided through ARRA for the meaningful use of electronic medical records would allow for these mental health and substance use providers, hospitals and facilities to be on par with the rest of the nation in regards to the electronic exchange of health information and as a result improve the health and safety of all patients.

Our organizations look forward to working with you to pass this bill during the 111th Congress. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association Practice Organization, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
Laurel Stine, J.D., Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15th Street, NW, #1212, Washington, DC 20005

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work/ABE
Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy *
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
The Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties *
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council on Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

* *not a MHLG member*