



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

April 21, 2010

Gene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
Office of the Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to offer our assistance to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as your agency begins to implement key provisions of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (P.L. 111-148) that call for the establishment of a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. Specifically, we would welcome the opportunity to provide input into the process for assembling both the Board of Governors and the Methodology Committees to oversee this critically important research enterprise.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 152,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Through our divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial, and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

In order to truly reform health care, any new infrastructure created for commissioning or conducting clinical comparative effectiveness research must adequately reflect the prominent role that psychological and behavioral factors play in disease prevention as well as the promotion and maintenance of wellness. According to the new health care reform law, the Board of Governors overseeing the new Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute must represent a "broad range of perspectives and collectively have scientific expertise in clinical health sciences research, including epidemiology, decision sciences, health economics, and statistics." We remain concerned that this language does not explicitly require the inclusion of an individual with expertise in mental and behavioral health and/or substance use disorders.

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Norman B. Anderson, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

Based on the considerations presented below, we urge you to include at least one psychologist on the Board of Governors.

Psychologists possess the most in-depth training in behavioral science, including methodological expertise in research design and evaluation, of all the mental health professions. The inclusion of a psychologist on the Board of Governors would provide the valuable perspective of a doctoral-level health professional with expertise in a broad range of health and mental health conditions that may be caused or modified by psychosocial factors and human behavior.

The Board should also give due consideration to the recent nonbinding recommendations issued by the Institute of Medicine and the Federal Coordinating Council for Comparative Effectiveness Research that call upon the new Institute to place high priority on the evaluation of behavioral treatments and preventive interventions for health and mental health conditions.

Even with the dramatic contributions that behavioral and social sciences research has made to date, much more needs to be done to understand the role of behavioral and social factors in disease and to use that knowledge to improve the nation's health. There is strong evidence that about half of the leading causes of death in this country can be attributed to behavioral factors, such as smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity. Understanding behavioral factors in health is critical to preventing diabetes, slowing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, reducing sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and preventing cancer or limiting its progression.

It is also crucial to note that mental illness is the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada for people between the ages of 15 and 44. Furthermore, the Global Burden of Disease study indicates that the burden of disease from mental disorders for countries like the United States exceeds that from any other health condition. Treatment for mental health and substance use disorders is effective. Recovery rates for mental disorders are comparable to, and even surpass, those for many physical health conditions. Knowing which treatments are most effective will dramatically enhance the capacity to prevent, diagnose, treat, and manage mental health and substance use disorders.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations related to the creation and oversight of the new Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Geoff Mumford, Associate Director for Science Government Relations, at gmumford@apa.org or 202.336.6067.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Anderson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Norman B. Anderson, PhD
Chief Executive Officer