

April 10, 2008

The Honorable Hilda L. Solis  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Solis:

On behalf of the 148,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing to express our support for the *Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007* (H.R. 3014), legislation to address the problem of health disparities.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprised of researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and graduate students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

Our association has a long standing commitment to the elimination of racial and ethnic disparities in health access and outcomes through an increased commitment to behavioral and biomedical research, improved data systems, culturally competent health care delivery, and efforts to increase public awareness of the existence of health disparities and the resources that are available to improve minority health outcomes.

As you know, there are pervasive racial and ethnic health and health care disparities in our nation. This is particularly visible with regard to mental and behavioral health among racial and ethnic minorities. The *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* has recognized that the "U.S. mental health system is not well equipped to meet the needs of racial and ethnic minority populations." Studies have shown that there are significant racial and ethnic differences in the utilization of mental health services among youth. Overall, mental health services meet the needs of 31 percent of non-minority children, but only 13 percent of minority children.

Another critically important area for consideration is the role of language access in an individual's ability to access a wide range of health care services and supports. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 47 million people over five years of age (18 percent) speak a language other than English at home. Therefore, having access to linguistically appropriate services is a significant factor in helping to break barriers that may limit a person's opportunity to access education, health care and employment.

*The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health* concluded, "Many in the mental health field consider cultural competence to be essential to ensure quality of care, responsiveness of services, and renewed hope for recovery among ethnic and racial minorities." Despite the fact that minorities are less likely to access mental health services, when they do obtain services, they tend to be ineffective and of low quality.

Consequently, increasing the cultural competence of service programs and providers is essential to improving mental health services for racial and ethnic minorities.

The *Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007* represents a critical step to reducing health disparities. It strongly supports strengthening mental health workforce diversity. It also increases efforts to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health care and removes language and cultural barriers to mental health care. In particular, APA appreciates the inclusion of mental and behavioral health provisions in the legislation.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for introducing this vital piece of legislation and for your leadership and commitment to eliminating health disparities. Your continued efforts have greatly helped to increase education and awareness about this critically important issue. We would also like to commend your staff, Noelle Lee, for her dedicated and collaborative efforts during the development of the *Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007*.

We look forward to working with you to secure passage of this vital legislation to ensure that all individuals, including racial and ethnic minorities, will have access to quality health care and experience optimal health. For further information, please contact Daniel E. Dawes, J.D., in our Public Interest Government Relations Office at (202) 682-5110 or [ddawes@apa.org](mailto:ddawes@apa.org).

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Public Interest Directorate

cc: Congressional Hispanic Caucus