

Mental Health Liaison Group

April 23, 2007

The Honorable Fortney Pete Stark
Chairman
Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group strongly support your legislation, H.R. 1663, the "Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2007."

Despite the fact that effective treatments exist, Medicare's current mental health benefit is not meeting the treatment needs of the millions of beneficiaries suffering from mental and emotional disorders. As representatives of the mental health community, we are heartened by your proposal to address these deficiencies.

There are numerous shortcomings in current Medicare policy. Medicare beneficiaries must pay 50% of the cost of outpatient mental health treatment, compared to only 20% of the cost for other outpatient services. Coverage of inpatient services in psychiatric facilities is capped at 190 days per a beneficiary's lifetime. Medicare does not cover such important service settings as crisis residential programs, therapeutic family or group treatment homes, and residential detoxification and substance abuse treatment centers. Medicare's coverage of core mental health professionals is limited, reducing beneficiaries' choice of provider and access to care. Medicare does not cover such important community-based services as psychiatric rehabilitation, intensive case management, and day treatment. The unfortunate result is that most Medicare beneficiaries in need of mental health treatment are not seen by a mental health specialist.

Your legislation helps address all of these issues, and its enactment would make a dramatic difference in the lives of Medicare beneficiaries with mental disorders. Research has given us an unprecedented arsenal of effective treatments for mental and emotional disorders. Today, mental illnesses are as treatable as other general medical conditions. These treatments must be made available. Policymakers must take action to end the discriminatory policies in place -- in the Medicare program and elsewhere -- which work against individuals with these disorders.

We commend you for your ongoing dedication to ensuring Americans have adequate access to effective mental health treatments, and we look forward to working with you to secure the ultimate enactment of these provisions affecting Medicare beneficiaries with mental health needs.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors

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

American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Mental Health America
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
United Jewish Communities