

# Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage

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## **POLL SHOWS CONGRESS NEEDS TO END INSURANCE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MENTAL ILLNESS NOW, COALITION SAYS**

Today the Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage released poll results showing that **83 percent** of Americans responding believe that health insurance policies should provide coverage for mental illnesses that is at least equal to what the policies provide for physical illnesses and injuries.

When asked how a one-percent increase in their annual health insurance premium would affect their view, a wide margin – **66 percent** versus 27 percent – said Congress should ban insurance discrimination against those who use mental health care services.

The poll was a national survey of **800 likely voters** and was **conducted April 18-21, 2004**, by Public Opinion Strategies. It has a **margin of error of plus or minus 3.46 percent**. It was conducted to help gauge what level of public support exists for legislation now in Congress, the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act, or MHETA (H.R. 953/S. 486). The Congressional Budget Office has recently projected that the legislation would bring about an average annual cost increase to group health plans of only 0.9 percent.

“We have shown that people want – and are even willing to pay more for – fair and equitable employer-provided mental health insurance,” said Michael Strazzella, who chairs the coalition and serves as deputy director of the American Psychiatric Association’s Department of Government Relations. “The message to congressional leadership is clear: it’s time for a floor vote on this urgently needed legislation.”

In the U.S. Senate, MHETA has 69 cosponsors and was introduced by Sens. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). There are 245 cosponsors in the House, where the bill was introduced by Reps. Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) and Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.). In addition, President Bush called on Congress in April 2002 to enact mental health parity legislation for him to sign into law.

“Not only do President Bush and majorities in both the House and the Senate support the legislation, but people recognize it as an issue of fundamental fairness,” said Strazzella. “It’s also time for Congress to act because such a law would save the nation’s economy billions of dollars in lost productivity.”

The General Accounting Office reports that nearly 90 percent of the nation’s health plans engage in legal discrimination against patients simply by virtue of a diagnosis of mental illness – a practice that **78 percent** of respondents said they think is “unfair” on principle. Untreated mental disorders cost businesses as much as \$79 billion each year in lost productivity and increased sick leave, according to the Surgeon General.

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*The Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage represents consumers, family members, health professionals, health care systems, and administrators. The Coalition’s members are: the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the National Mental Health Association, the American Hospital Association, the American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the Federation of American Hospitals, and the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems.*

***Mental illness coverage. It’s time to be fair by treating it equally in health care.***

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