

# Mental Health Liaison Group

May 26, 2005

The Honorable Olympia Snowe  
U.S. Senator  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kerry  
U.S. Senator  
404 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Snowe and Kerry:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group, representing patients, health professionals and family members, are pleased to support your legislation, the Medicare Mental Health Copayment Equity Act. Under your legislation, Medicare's historic discriminatory 50 percent coinsurance for outpatient mental health care would be reduced over six years to 20 percent, bringing the coinsurance into line with that required of Medicare beneficiaries for other Part B services.

Simply put, current law discriminates against Medicare beneficiaries who seek treatment for mental illness. This affects elderly and non-elderly Medicare beneficiaries alike when they seek mental health care. According to the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General's report on mental health, almost 20 percent of elderly individuals have some type of mental disorder uncommon in typical aging. In addition, elderly individuals have the highest rate of suicide in the U.S., often the result of depression. The Surgeon General's report states, "Late-life depression is particularly costly because of the excess disability that it causes and its deleterious interaction with physical health. Older primary care patients with depression visit the doctor and emergency rooms more often, use more medication, incur higher outpatient charges, and stay longer at the hospital."

The 50 percent coinsurance requirement also is unfair to the non-elderly disabled Medicare population. Because many of these individuals have severe mental illnesses combined with low incomes and high medical expenses, a 50 percent coinsurance obligation is a serious patient burden. For elderly and non-elderly Medicare beneficiaries alike, Medicare is a critical source of care. Your legislation to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries needing mental health care incur only the same cost-sharing obligations as required of all other Medicare patients would end the statutory discrimination against Medicare beneficiaries seeking treatment for mental disorders.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing this important issue for the nation's 40 million Medicare patients.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association of Children's Residential Centers

American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric 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  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
Clinical Social Work Guild  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems  
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses  
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
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 Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils  
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Mental Health Association  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA