

# Mental Health Liaison Group

April 24, 2001

The Honorable Fortney Pete Stark  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Stark:

The undersigned member organizations of the Mental Health Liaison Group strongly support your legislation, the "Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2001" (H.R. 1522).

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.

*(over)*

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Scott Barstow, American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304  
(703) 823-9800 x234 phone, (703) 823-0252 fax, Sbarstow@counseling.org email

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Sincerely,

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Family Foundation  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Health  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services  
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Coalition for the Homeless  
National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association  
National Mental Health Association  
Tourette Syndrome Association

# Mental Health Liaison Group

April 24, 2001

The Honorable Paul David Wellstone  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wellstone:

The undersigned member organizations of the Mental Health Liaison Group strongly support your legislation, the "Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2001" (S. 690).

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.

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