



May 11, 2016

### **Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2015 (S.2173/H.R. 3712)**

Since launching our action alert in October, 2015, 1,715 advocates sent 5,649 emails to Congress about the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173/H.R. 3712)*. You can find the alert on our [web site](#).

NASW members are still working on securing GOP support and urge you to reach out to your members of Congress to advocate on how important the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2015 (S.2173/H.R. 3712)* is to social workers nationwide.

Co-sponsors of the legislation include: (\*\* indicates original sponsor; \* indicates original cosponsor)

#### *Senate*

- Sen. Stabenow, Debbie [D-MI]\*\* 10/08/2015
- Sen. Mikulski, Barbara A. [D-MD]\* 10/08/2015
- Sen. Murphy, Christopher S. [D-CT] 02/25/2016
- Sen. Blumenthal, Richard [D-CT] 04/07/2016

#### *House of Representatives*

- Rep. Lee, Barbara [D-CA-13]\*\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Ashford, Brad [D-NE-2] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Bordallo, Madeleine Z. [D-GU-At Large]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Brown, Corrine [D-FL-5]\* 10/08/2015

- Rep. Clarke, Yvette D. [D-NY-9]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Cohen, Steve [D-TN-9] 10/16/2015
- Rep. DeFazio, Peter A. [D-OR-4] 04/11/2016
- Rep. Grijalva, Raul M. [D-AZ-3]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Gutierrez, Luis V. [D-IL-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Honda, Michael M. [D-CA-17]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. McCollum, Betty [D-MN-4] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Moore, Gwen [D-WI-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Norton, Eleanor Holmes [D-DC-At Large]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Schakowsky, Janice D. [D-IL-9] 10/20/2015
- Rep. Serrano, Jose E. [D-NY-15] 03/14/2016
- Rep. Watson Coleman, Bonnie [D-NJ-12]\* 10/08/2015

NASW has secured supporters of the legislation, listed below:

- American Geriatrics Society
- Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
- Clinical Social Work Association
- Council on Social Work Education
- Justice in Aging
- NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
- National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
- National Coalition for Care Coordination (N3C)
- National League for Nursing
- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

On April 25, 2016, NASW National Staff, Polsinelli Staff and NASW Chapter Staff held a webinar to discuss the legislation and ways to organize around it.

As part of the NASW National Conference, we are hosting an Advocacy Program on Capitol Hill on June 22, 2016. This Advocacy Program is fully subscribed. We are hosting a webinar in May for the Advocacy Program participants to help prepare them for the Advocacy Program.

On July 25, 2016, we will host a webinar for members on the political process and specifically the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2015*. Participants will learn about what NASW is doing to promote the bill and how they can get involved.

### **Other Legislative Activity**

*Older Americans Act*: The Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2016 was signed into law (P.L. 114-144) by President Obama on April 19. This bipartisan legislation had been passed unanimously by the Senate last summer; in late March, the House passed a slightly amended version of the bill, which was then approved by the Senate. Although the OAA updates included in the law are modest,

reauthorization required five years of advocacy by NASW and other advocates. The association celebrates the passage of this legislation, which reauthorizes OAA services through 2019. At the same time, NASW remains concerned that funding remains inadequate to realize fully the mission of the OAA. NASW recently updated its [OAA issue brief](#) to this effect. The association also signed on to letters advocating for increased OAA appropriations by the [Senate](#) and the [House](#) in fiscal year 2017.

*Mental Health Reform Act of 2016:* NASW was invited to a meeting with Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Christopher Murphy (D-CT) and to discuss strategy to move the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680). This bi-partisan bill advanced out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and may come to the Senate floor in the coming weeks. The bill seeks to integrate physical and mental health services, establish new programs for early intervention and strengthen mental health parity transparency and enforcement.

NASW sent an [action alert](#) to our Advocacy Listserv to encourage co-sponsorship. In a matter of hours, 400 advocates sent 1,030 emails to Congress. Activities will be occurring throughout May and June to push for passage. NASW will participate in the Mental Health Summit on May 26 on Capitol Hill. If you are in the area and want to register, visit here: [bit.ly/mental-health-rsvp](http://bit.ly/mental-health-rsvp).

### **The Administration**

NASW submitted comments to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in response to FDASIA 907 public meeting, to encourage diversity in clinical trials and the engagement of research participants and community stakeholders as valued partners.

[NASW submits comments to the FDA regarding Progress on Enhancing the Collection, Analysis, and Availability of Demographic Subgroup Data \(04/28/16\)](#)

### **Coalition Work**

NASW participated in coalition work with:

- Eldercare Workforce Alliance
- Leadership Council of Aging Organizations
- Social Work and Health Care Work Group
- Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

### **Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) Meeting**

1. Chronic Care – Jay Sulzmann, Legislative Director, Office of Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA)

Sen. Isakson is on the Finance Committee. He's been working for 3 years on reforming the Medicare program to focus on chronic care as well as acute care. In 2014 he introduced the Better Care at Lower Cost Act (S. 1932) along with Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR).

Sen. Isakson has brought together a working group to solicit feedback from stakeholders. They are currently going through the feedback. They are getting technical assistance from CMS and expect to draft legislation this summer or early fall.

In the Q&A he talked about telehealth being a major topic of discussion. He also discussed the scope of chronic care and interoperability. There is another Finance Committee working group on Health Information Technology (HITECH).

They are working with the National Quality Forum to develop quality measures and look at social determinants of health.

They want to invest in preventive care and encourage partnerships with non-health community based organizations.

2. Medicaid Coverage for Addiction Recovery Expansion (CARE) Act (S. 2605) – Max Kanner, Legislative Aide, Office of Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL)

In response to the opioid and heroin epidemic, Sen. Durbin is working on a bill related to residential substance abuse. Sen. Angus King (I-ME) is the co-sponsor. The legislation would amend the IMD exclusion up to 40 beds from 16 beds. This captures the majority of facilities. Clients could have 30 days plus an additional 30 days if seen as progressing. The 60 day limit relates to a continuous stay. There would be grant programs for facilities that serve youth.

There was a hearing last week on mental health in the Senate Finance Committee. California has a waiver on IMD and substance abuse which they are glad to see moving forward.

3. Mental Health Reform Act – Joe Dunn, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT); Brenda Destro, Senior Public Health Advisor, Office of Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

Joe spoke about them being thankful for support from the mental health community. There may be an opportunity to get a floor vote in the next 60 days on S. 2680, although the Senate will be spending a lot of time on appropriations.

There is a coordinated strategy. On May 26 there will be a summit on the Hill to discuss the legislation. A save the date will be forthcoming.

S. 2680 has been reported out of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. The offices are looking for feedback. They are working with staff of Sen. Alexander (R-TN) and Sen. Murray (D-WA). They have reached out to Sen. Stabenow (D-MI) and Sen. Blunt (R-MO).

There is strong bi-partisan support to move the comprehensive mental health reform legislation. The election may make it difficult to pass it, but the focus will be on the next 60 days.

4. Charitable Choice – Dena Sher, Assistant Legislative Director, Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Michael Lieberman, Anti-Defamation League; and Jennifer Baily, Human Rights Campaign

Charitable choice is a highly controversial provision that sanctions taxpayer-funded religious discrimination in employment, threatens state and local anti-discrimination laws, and undermines critical religious liberty protections for beneficiaries of government social service programs. It has been incorporated into four social service program authorizations, including for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The Defense bill has a potential amendment on charitable choice that would apply to all contracts and grants throughout the federal government.

NASW has signed onto a letter opposing the amendment.

### **Support Letters**

NASW has signed onto a number of letters of support. You can find a list of letters of support on our [web page](#). A sample of letters from April is below.

- [NASW signs letter opposing a Balanced Budget Amendment \(04/20/16\)](#)
- [NASW signs on to Leadership Council of Aging Organizations letter urging the House Appropriations Committee to prioritize investments in the Older Americans Act and other aging programs in the fiscal year 2017 Labor-HHS appropriations bill \(4/15/2016\)](#)
- [NASW signs on to Leadership Council of Aging Organizations letter urging the Senate Appropriations Committee to prioritize investments in the Older Americans Act and other aging programs in the fiscal year 2017 Labor-HHS appropriations bill \(4/15/2016\)](#)

NASW has also submitted its own comments to the Administration. You can find this list on our [web page](#) as well. The comments from April are below.

- [NASW submits comments to the FDA regarding Progress on Enhancing the Collection, Analysis, and Availability of Demographic Subgroup Data \(04/28/16\)](#)
- [NASW submits comments regarding the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Proposed Rule 42 C.F.R. Part 2- Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records \(04/07/16\)](#)
- [NASW writes letter in support of the Proposed Department of Labor \(Wage and Hour Division\) Rule on Establishing Paid Sick Leave for Federal Contactors \(RIN 1235-AA13\) \(04/12/16\)](#)