

October 1, 2015

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Energy & Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
Energy & Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Ranking Member Pallone:

On behalf of the undersigned national mental health and substance use advocacy organizations, we are writing to urge your Committee to undertake consideration and markup of meaningful mental health reform legislation.

As you are aware, more than 13 million Americans have severe schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. The majority of these people are going without treatment, and families are struggling to find care for loved ones. Hearings before the Energy & Commerce Committee over the past two years have demonstrated that our country's approach to mental health has resulted in a confusing patchwork of programs and policies spanning numerous federal and state agencies. Instead of receiving treatment, individuals suffering from mental illness frequently end up in the criminal justice system, boarded in an emergency room, or on the streets because services are not available. Legislation and resources are needed, and needed now, to help improve this desperate situation for millions of Americans in need of treatment and their families.

Legislation has been introduced in the past several months to comprehensively address the issues faced by individuals with serious mental illness, as well as the 60 million Americans who live with a diagnosable psychiatric or substance use disorder. Despite recent gains achieved in medical research and public awareness, managing psychiatric and substance use disorders remains a challenging task for physicians, providers, patients, and their families. This is unnecessarily complicated by wide-ranging factors that include fragmented delivery and reimbursement systems, regulatory barriers, workforce shortages, and the enduring stigma surrounding mental health.

The Congress and your Committee regularly act to ensure that Americans with heart disease, cancer or any other medical illness have access to care. The same should be true for those with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and other serious mental illness. Legislation is needed that would better coordinate mental health resources, strengthen access to necessary community and inpatient integrated treatment, improve earlier access to mental health services for children and adolescents, promote critical mental health research activities, and enhance the available clinical workforce, among other needed reforms.

We appreciate that your Committee has numerous priorities, but we believe that mental health legislation should be at the top of the list. In the past year, we have spoken to many of your colleagues and their staff who have felt the impact of mental illness within their families. Their experiences of stigma, frustration and confusion on how to access care are also experienced by

tens of millions of Americans every day. The need for comprehensive reform is urgent, and you have the opportunity to improve the lives of tens of millions of Americans, their families, and our communities.

We urge you to act now to advance meaningful bipartisan mental health reform legislation. Thank you for considering this request and please let the undersigned know how we can assist you in addressing this critical national need.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American College of Emergency Physicians
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Community Catalyst
Eating Disorders Coalition
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Behavioral Health
National League for Nursing
School Social Work Association of America
Treatment Advocacy Center

CC:

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives