The Honorable Tina Smith United States Senate 720 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510 The Honorable Jerry Moran United States Senate 521 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith and Senator Moran:

The undersigned organizations write in support of your legislation, the *Improving Access to Behavioral Health Integration Act* (S. 4306). These organizations represent an array of consumers, families, advocates, practitioner groups and other stakeholders that share a common goal of improving access to quality mental and behavioral health care.

Our nation's healthcare system is fragmented and underfunded as the country confronts an unprecedented crisis of mental health burden. Even prior to the opioid epidemic and COVID pandemic, 50% of adult Americans with a behavioral health condition received no behavioral care at all, and 2019 CDC survey data showed more than 1 in 3 high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan. Since then, an unprecedented growth in behavioral health problems has affected all segments of the American population, from children and youth to adults. Given the present situation, it is clearly time for an 'all hands on deck' approach to expanding access to mental health and substance use treatment.

One important way to accomplish this is by integrating evidence-based behavioral health care services and providers into primary care settings. As shown by both the experience of health care systems across the country and a large body of research, team-based care incorporating mental health service providers into primary care practices can increase access to behavioral health services, improve patient outcomes, increase the efficiency of primary care practices, and reduce treatment costs. Integrating behavioral health services into the primary care setting also helps reduce the stigma associated with behavioral health treatment. But despite its promise, adoption of evidence-based integrated care has been challenging, particularly for small and independent primary care practices, due to the considerable costs associated with practice changes including training and hiring staff, upgrading and standardizing health information systems, and implementing new operating procedures.

Your legislation would provide direct support to both pediatric and adult primary care practices to help them overcome these initial hurdles, prioritizing small practices and those operating in health professional shortage areas, and in Tribal or other medically underserved communities where the need is greatest. It would also prioritize assistance to primary care practices that can demonstrate a pathway to financially sustaining integrated care services beyond the initial grant period.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing this important behavioral health legislation. We urge its adoption by Congress and look forward to working with you on this and other health policy issues.

Sincerely, American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselor Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Clinical Social Work Association

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

International OCD Foundation

International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

Lakeshore Foundation

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of Social Workers

National Federation of Families

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National League for Nursing

NHMH - No Health without Mental Health

REDC Consortium

RI International

SMART Recovery

The Kennedy Forum

Trust for America's Health