

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 8, 2017

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Tonko:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to support the Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act of 2017. This critical legislation eliminates the discrimination against mental illnesses that continues to exist in the Medicare program as Medicare beneficiaries are limited to 190-days of inpatient psychiatric hospital care during their lifetime. This lifetime limit does not apply to psychiatric units in general hospitals and there is no such lifetime limit for any other Medicare specialty inpatient hospital service.

Through passage of landmark legislation, the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008, Congress put coverage for mental health and substance use disorders on par with other medical disorders. Also that year, Congress passed important legislation to phase-in equalization of the Medicare outpatient coinsurance for mental and physical health. We must now finish the parity job and finally give Medicare beneficiaries the full parity that other individuals now have.

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission reported that most Medicare beneficiaries treated in inpatient psychiatric facilities qualify for Medicare because of disability, hence they tend to be younger and poorer than the typical Medicare beneficiary. These Medicare beneficiaries live with serious mental illnesses (such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) and who are living with these disorders from a relatively young age. These illnesses are chronic and will require ongoing treatment and care over their lifetimes, including hospitalization when in crisis. The elimination of the 190-day limit will equalize Medicare mental health coverage with private health insurance coverage, offer beneficiaries the choice of inpatient psychiatric care providers, increase access for the most seriously ill, improve continuity of care and create a more cost-effective Medicare program.

We look forward to working with you to enact the Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act of 2017 to eliminate discrimination against Medicare beneficiaries with mental health and substance use disorders.

American Association on Health and Disability
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Art Therapy Association

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, JD, American Psychological Association at lstine@apa.org, Jeff Regan, MA, American Psychiatric Association
at jregan@psych.org, and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net

American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Disability Rights Network
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
Treatment Communities of America