

March 4, 2020

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bill Huizenga
U.S. House of Representatives
2232 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Tonko and Huizenga:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)— a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders— is pleased to support the Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act. 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.

The MHLG commends your bipartisan leadership and looks forward to working with you and your staff to enact the Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Suicidology
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors 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
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
International OCD Foundation
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
NHMH- No Health without Mental Health
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
Treatment Communities of America