



Working Together for an Affordable Future

February 12, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senate  
133 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: The Excellence in Mental Health Act

Dear Senator Stabenow:

The National Coalition on Health Care (NCHC) commends your introduction of the Excellence in Mental Health Act of 2013, which provides financial support for behavioral health services through changes in Medicaid payment eligibilities and moves our health system closer to providing higher-quality, integrated care.

As the nation's broadest-based group working to achieve comprehensive health system reform, NCHC recognizes the importance of including behavioral health care in shifting our health system away from a focus on reactive care toward a more proactive approach centered on prevention and management of chronic conditions. The Excellence in Mental Health Act takes important steps toward such a higher-value health system, and we support its prompt enactment into law.

One in four adults in America- or approximately 58 million individuals- suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.<sup>1</sup> Less than a third of these adults, and half of children, are then identified and diagnosed under the current health system.<sup>2</sup> Even after diagnosis, few structures exist to provide sustained mental health services and support individuals through their treatment regime. Access to mental health care in the US is worse than other types of medical services: almost 90 million Americans live in federally-designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas.<sup>3</sup> Untreated mental illnesses in the US cost more than \$100 billion a year in lost productivity, which does not even account for resources spent on associated chronic physical diseases, special

<sup>1</sup> Kessler RC, Chiu WT, Demler O, Walters EE. Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2005 Jun;62(6):617-27.

<sup>2</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness. *Mental Illness: Facts and Numbers*. Published 2012.

[http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=About\\_Mental\\_Illness&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=53155](http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=About_Mental_Illness&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=53155). Accessed 3 February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists*. Published 29 March 2012.

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/mental-health-counselors-and-marriage-and-family-therapists.htm>. Accessed 3 February 2013.

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education classes, and courts and jails.<sup>4</sup> The Excellence in Mental Health Act expands access to crucial mental health services by constructing, improving, and expanding criteria for community behavioral health centers, while holding these facilities to higher, evidence-based quality standards.

Moreover, even though the majority of adults who receive mental health care have some form of health insurance coverage, limitations on coverage and cost remain significant barriers to receiving mental health services.<sup>5</sup> The Excellence in Mental Health Act's amendment to the 340B drug discount program allows participation by entities delivering community health services or treatment for substance abuse. This expansion of the program provides critical support to Americans seeking mental health services, especially since current mental health dollars mostly go toward prescription drugs and outpatient treatment.<sup>6</sup>

Taking these steps outlined in The Excellence in Mental Health Act of 2013 has the potential to reduce the escalation in psychiatric emergencies and unaddressed mental health conditions, resulting in better health at lower costs. We look forward to working with you to secure the enactment of this legislation.

Sincerely,



John Rother  
President and CEO  
National Coalition on Health Care

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<sup>4</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness. State Mental Health Cuts: The Continuing Crisis. Published 2012 March. [http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=state\\_budget\\_cuts\\_report](http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=state_budget_cuts_report). Accessed 12 February 2013.

<sup>5</sup> SAMHSA. Results from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings. Published September 2011. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10ResultsRev/NSDUHresultsRev2010.htm>. Accessed 8 February 2013.

<sup>6</sup> SAMHSA. National Expenditures for Mental Health Services and Substance Abuse Treatment, 1986-2005. Published 2010. <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4612/SMA10-4612.pdf>. Accessed 8 February 2013.