

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