

# Mental Health Liaison Group

March 18, 2003

The Honorable Fortney Pete Stark  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jon Corzine  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Stark and Senator Corzine:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group strongly support your legislation, the “Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2003.”

Despite the fact that effective treatments exist, Medicare’s current mental health benefit is not meeting the treatment needs of the millions of beneficiaries suffering from mental and emotional disorders. As representatives of the mental health community, we are heartened by your proposal to address these deficiencies.

There are numerous shortcomings in current Medicare policy. Medicare beneficiaries must pay 50% of the cost of outpatient mental health treatment, compared to only 20% of the cost for other outpatient services. Coverage of inpatient services in psychiatric facilities is capped at 190 days per a beneficiary’s lifetime. Medicare does not cover such important service settings as crisis residential programs, therapeutic family or group treatment homes, and residential detoxification and substance abuse treatment centers. Medicare’s coverage of core mental health professionals is limited, reducing beneficiaries’ choice of provider and access to care. Medicare does not cover such important community-based services as psychiatric rehabilitation, intensive case management, and day treatment. The unfortunate result is that most Medicare beneficiaries in need of mental health treatment are not seen by a mental health specialist.

Your legislation helps address all of these issues, and its enactment would make a dramatic difference in the lives of Medicare beneficiaries with mental disorders. Research has given us an unprecedented arsenal of effective treatments for mental and emotional disorders. Today, mental illnesses are as treatable as other general medical conditions. These treatments must be made available. Policymakers must take action to end the discriminatory policies in place—in the Medicare program and elsewhere—which work against individuals with these disorders.

We commend you for your ongoing dedication to ensuring Americans have adequate access to effective mental health treatments, and we look forward to working with you to secure the ultimate enactment of these provisions affecting Medicare beneficiaries with mental health needs.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association Practice Organization, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

American Association of Children's Residential Centers  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation  
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work  
American Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Psychotherapy Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Employee Assistance Professionals Association  
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences  
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services  
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses  
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD  
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors  
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils  
National Association of Protection & Advocacy Systems  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Mental Health Association  
Suicide Prevention Action Network  
Tourette Syndrome Association  
Treatment and Research Advancements Association for Personality Disorder  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations