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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6200

August 1, 2013

Dear Mental Health Community,

Mental illness affects Americans at an alarmingly high rate. One in every four Americans – or over 60 million people – will be impacted by mental illness every year. More than 13 million of these individuals live with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder. Young Americans are particularly susceptible to mental illness – approximately 20 percent of youth ages 13 to 18 will experience mental disorders in a given year. Additionally, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2010 suicide was the second-leading cause of death among children aged 12 to17 years. Whether openly discussed or not, the American public is coping with mental illness.

Failure to address mental illness negatively impacts society. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, serious mental illness costs approximately $193 billion in lost earnings each year. Individuals with serious mental illness are more likely to have chronic medical conditions and on average die earlier than other Americans. Suicide has become the tenth leading cause of death in the United States and the third leading cause of death for those ages 15 to 24 years old. Suicide disproportionately impacts military members with veterans representing 20 percent of suicides nationally.

But there is reason to remain positive. High quality treatment of mental illness can be effective. With a combination of pharmacological and psychosocial interventions, between 70 and 90 percent of individuals with mental illness have significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life. Some state models show promise in integrating physical and mental health care for those in need, but, unfortunately, many are still not getting care. Approximately 60 percent of adults, and almost half of youth, with mental illness received no mental health services during the previous year. This gap in coverage results from a variety of factors, such as: stigma, lack of mental health providers, lack of insurance, or limitations on coverage for mental health services. Finding better solutions is key to ensuring better care for all Americans.

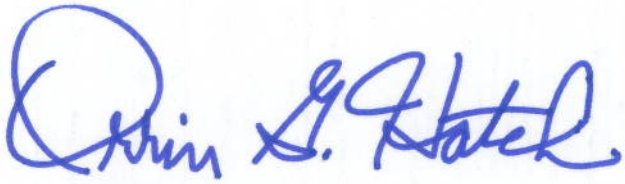
The Finance Committee is exploring better solutions. To that end, we would like your input on how to improve the mental health system in the United States. Specifically, we would like to know:

I. What administrative and legislative barriers prevent Medicare and Medicaid recipients from obtaining the mental and behavioral health care they need?
II. What are the key policies that have led to improved outcomes for beneficiaries in programs that have tried integrated care models?
III. How can Medicare and Medicaid be cost-effectively reformed to improve access to and quality of care for people with mental and behavioral health needs?

We look forward to your responses. Please submit them by September 30, 2013 to MentalHealth@finance.senate.gov. If you have questions, please contact Kelly Whitener or Kim Brandt at (202) 224- 4515.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
Chairman



Orrin G. Hatch
Ranking Member