

NEWS FROM U.S. SENATOR SHELDON WHITEHOUSE

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Whitehouse Introduces Legislation to Improve Mental Health Care *Bill Would Expand Use of Electronic Records for Mental Health Providers*

Washington, DC – Last year, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) made an unprecedented investment in our medical infrastructure, providing almost \$20 billion in incentive funds for health information technology. This long term investment will enhance the efficiency, cost effectiveness, and quality of health care. However, an important group of health care providers were excluded from these incentives: behavioral health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment professionals and facilities. Today, U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) introduced legislation to correct that inequity.

“These providers are the backbone of our mental health care system, and it is vital that they have access to cost-saving, quality-enhancing advances in health information technology,” said Whitehouse. “By expanding the use of electronic health records, my legislation will give mental health professionals access to comprehensive and up to date medical histories, enhancing the precision of diagnoses and reducing medication errors.”

The Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010 will:

- Expand the types of providers eligible for Medicare and Medicaid incentives for the use of electronic health records to include licensed psychologists and clinical social workers;
- Expand Medicare hospital incentive funding eligibility to include inpatient psychiatric hospitals;
- Expand Medicaid hospital meaningful use incentive funding eligibility to include community mental health centers, mental health treatment facilities, psychiatric hospitals and substance abuse treatment facilities; and
- Clarify eligibility of community mental health centers, psychiatric hospitals, behavioral and mental health professionals, substance abuse professionals, mental health treatment facilities, and substance abuse treatment facilities for technical assistance from Regional HIT Extension Centers.

Companion legislation has also been introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI).

Whitehouse has been a national leader on the implementation of HIT. Last year he spearheaded the effort to create HIT regional extension centers to provide information and technical assistance to doctors who implement this new technology. He was also a lead advocate for the creation of the “Beacon Communities” program which was established as part of the Recovery Act's overall \$18 billion federal investment in HIT. This program will establish a series of fully operable HIT

“communities” around the country - including one in Rhode Island - to serve as models for the rest of the nation.

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