

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 17, 2011**

**CONTACT: Jodi Seth (Kerry), 202-224-4159**

**Brandon Bouchard (Snowe), 202-224-5344**

## **Kerry, Snowe Legislation Would End Mental Health Discrimination in Medicare**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) today introduced legislation to end discrimination against Medicare patients who suffer from mental illness.

Current Medicare beneficiaries are eligible to receive a total of 190 days of inpatient psychiatric hospital care throughout their lifetimes regardless of their need. This arbitrary cap on benefits discriminates against the mentally ill in that it does not impose a lifetime limit for any other Medicare specialty inpatient hospital service. The *Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act* (S. 374) would eliminate this limit and equalize Medicare mental health coverage with private health insurance coverage. The legislation would also expand beneficiaries' choices for inpatient psychiatric care providers, increase access for the seriously ill, and improve continuity of care.

“There is no good reason why Medicare should randomly shut down benefits and force mentally ill seniors to go without treatment. After all the battles we’ve fought to equalize mental health care in this country, enforcing an outdated policy makes zero sense. I don’t get it. This is the last thing a senior living with mental illness should have to worry about, period, and we’ll keep working on it until it’s fixed,” said Senator Kerry.

“Despite the tremendous inroads we have made in ending the discriminatory treatment of higher copayments for mental health services under Medicare, it is abundantly clear that we still have barriers to overcome,” said Senator Snowe. “Eliminating the lifetime cap on inpatient psychiatric hospital care takes another critical step in ending the unfair distinction between physical and mental disorders. This legislation will better ensure that seniors are receiving care in the right place at the right time.”

Senators Kerry and Snowe first [introduced](#) the *Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act* last year. Eighty national organizations have endorsed the *Medical Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act* including AARP, the American Hospital Association, the National Association of Psychiatric

Health Systems, and the American Psychological Association. The text of the legislation and full list of organizations are attached.

# # #

**Mike Flynn**

Deputy Press Secretary

Senator John Kerry

(202) 224-4159

<http://kerry.senate.gov>

*Follow Senator Kerry on Twitter [@JohnKerry](#)*

*Click [here](#) to sign up for Senator Kerry's newsletter*

*To unsubscribe from Senator Kerry's press list, click [here](#)*