

Mental Health America Urges Rejection of Health Reform Repeal

New Law Takes Ground-Breaking Steps to Expand Access, Prevention

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. (January 19, 2011)—Mental Health America today urged the House of Representatives to reject a repeal of the health reform law, which it said takes ground-breaking steps to expand access to care and prevention of mental health and substance use conditions.

"The health care reform law marks a tremendous step forward in our efforts to improve access to care for individuals with mental health or substance use conditions and in our advocacy for prevention of these conditions," said David Shern, Ph.D., president and CEO of Mental Health America.

"Despite significant advances in our understanding of how to effectively treat behavioral health conditions, people with serious mental illnesses who are treated in our public systems die on average 25 years earlier than the general population due to inadequate care. Health plan barriers and inadequate coverage limit access to outpatient mental health services at twice the rate as for other services.

"Treatment for these conditions is recognized as critical to overall health and the law embraces that truth. By including mental health and substance use services as essential benefits that must be covered in new plans offered to the uninsured and through the expansion of Medicaid, it will improve care for conditions that are among the most chronic and disabling affecting the U.S. population."

Dr. Shern said the law removes barriers and improves access to care by prohibiting pre-existing exclusions and extending to new plans sold through the exchanges and the expansion of Medicaid the requirements of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Treatment Act, which establishes that discriminatory limits on mental health and substance use conditions will no longer be permitted.

Mental health and addiction treatment have historically been subject to blatantly discriminatory limits on coverage through private insurance plans that block access to effective and critically needed therapies.

The health care reform law also establishes a new requirement that coverage for dependent children must be available up to age 26 and provides additional funding for school-based health clinics.

"These provisions are critical in light of the fact that half of all people with a mental health diagnosis first experience it by age 14, but will not receive treatment until many years later, if at all," Dr. Shern said. "It also places a high priority on prevention by covering preventive services and programs to support community-based prevention activities."

He noted that the health care law reduces the federal deficit by over \$100 billion over the next 10 years and saves more money in the years beyond that time period.

"This law improves the quality of care while reducing cost. Repeal will only dig a bigger hole in the deficit and deny services and treatments that can help millions of Americans live full, productive lives," he said.

"We should allow the law to move forward and deliver on the progress it will achieve."

Mental Health America is the country's leading nonprofit dedicated to helping all people live mentally healthier lives. With our century of service to America and our more than 300 affiliates nationwide, we represent a national movement that promotes mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation— everyday and in times of crisis.