

Date

The Honorable Patrick Kennedy
407 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Timothy Murphy
322 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Kennedy and Murphy:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families and communities, the undersigned organizations write today in strong support for HR 5040, the *Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010*, a bill to extend the meaningful use incentives established through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to mental health and substance abuse providers and facilities.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides \$20 billion in incentives and grants to health care providers and hospitals to establish interoperable electronic health record (EHR) systems throughout the nation. These benefits are extended to most physicians, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, podiatrists and most hospitals. However, an important sector of the health care community is excluded—clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric hospitals, substance use treatment facilities and mental health treatment facilities.

The ultimate goal of widespread adoption of health information technology – to save American lives through improved coordination of care – is particularly relevant to persons with mental and addictive disorders. Recent studies have revealed that persons with serious mental illness die sooner than other Americans, and have an average age of death at 52. Health information technology (HIT) is the essential cornerstone of efforts to address this emerging public health crisis. HIT will enable behavioral health and substance abuse providers to effectively coordinate care across mental health and substance abuse service systems, primary care entities, and specialty medicine.

The *Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010* would make important changes to Medicare and Medicaid to ensure that the incentives provided through ARRA for the meaningful use of electronic medical records would allow for these mental health and substance use providers, hospitals and facilities to be on par with the rest of the nation in regards to the electronic exchange of health information and as a result improve the health and safety of all patients.

Our organizations look forward to working with you to pass this bill during the 111th Congress.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely