

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

February 8, 2008

The Honorable Jack Reed
728 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gordon H. Smith
404 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Reed and Senator Smith:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), I am writing to express strong support for the Community Mental Health Services Improvement Act (S. 2182) and the Community-Based Mental Health Infrastructure Improvement Act (S. 2183).


Mental illness is a major co-occurring problem for adults with chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Also, postpartum depression has become an increasingly diagnosed problem. Local health departments (LHDs) are involved in prevention and identification and treatment and/or referral for all these illnesses. NACCHO supports the development of strong coordination, collaboration and communication among mental health, public health and primary care practices and systems at the local, state and national levels.

Interventions for adults with co-occurring physical and mental disorders have been shown in studies to be more effectively treated in an integrated atmosphere of public health, primary care and mental health or primary care and mental health. These integrated models have been shown to effectively and collaboratively address the issues of affordable and appropriate mental health services. We are particularly pleased with the inclusion of provisions in this legislation that would co-locate primary care, specialty medical care and substance use treatment services in Community Mental Health Organizations throughout the United States. In addition, your legislation would appropriate much-needed funding to support the construction or modernization of facilities used to provide mental health and behavioral health services.

Since the President's New Freedom Commission Report referred to a "workforce crisis" in the mental health and substance abuse field, we also support the personnel preparation initiatives contained in these bills. Both the new university-based training programs as well as additional student loan assistance will help community mental health programs operating in health professional shortage areas. In addition, the new tele-mental health and health information technology programs contained in your legislation will help address the twin goals of improving the quality of care and expanding access to behavioral health services in rural areas. NACCHO understands the "workforce crisis" as our 2005 National Profile of Local Health Departments indicated LHDs are also facing a shortage particularly within the nursing fields, and this leads to challenges in providing adequate services from appropriately trained professionals.

Thank you for your advocacy and leadership on behalf of people with mental illness and addictions. We look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Patrick M. Libbey
Executive Director

