

July 1, 2009

The Honorable Jack Reed
SH-728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Strong Support for Sen. Reed's Mental Health/Primary Care Co-Coalition Amendment

Dear Senator Reed:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NCCBH) – representing 1,600 Community Mental Health Centers and other community-based mental health and addiction agencies serving over 6 million low-income persons with mental health and addiction disorders – I am writing to express our very strong support for the Reed amendment to the Affordable Health Choices Act, which would co-locate primary care capacity in community mental health settings.

People with serious mental disorders treated in state mental health systems – a total exceeding 3 million persons – are confronting an emerging public health crisis. According to a recent study financed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), individuals with conditions like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major clinical depression served by public mental health agencies **die – on average – 25 years sooner than other Americans.** The same SAMHSA survey of eight (8) states explains these shocking mortality data by documenting a sky high incidence of co-occurring chronic diseases among this low income disability population including cancer, diabetes, asthma, heart diseases and cardio-pulmonary conditions of all kinds. At the same time, clients of public mental health service agencies have little or no access to specialty medical services or even basic primary health care.

In brief, Senator Reed, my members desperately need help addressing this public health emergency. By co-locating primary care capacity in Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other front line community-based mental health and substance abuse providers, the Reed amendment finances an integrated care model that facilitates access to needed medical services. We are also excited about the prevention and wellness activities in the amendment leading to better management of chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes and diseases linked to smoking.

Thank you for your extraordinary leadership. We will fight as hard as we can to ensure passage of your amendment.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW
President and CEO