



November 15, 2007

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

The Honorable Gordon H. Smith
404 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reed and Senator Smith:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health, a national non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority, I am writing to express support for the Community Mental Health Services Improvement Act (S. 2182).

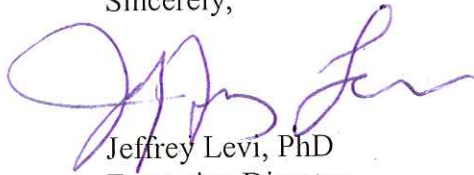
Individuals with severe mental illness are at higher risk for chronic diseases and often do not receive the treatment necessary to address these medical concerns. As a result, those with serious mental illnesses are dying sooner than the general population. According to a recent eight state survey published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Preventing Chronic Disease*, persons with serious mental illnesses who receive publicly financed mental health care die an average of 25 years sooner than other state residents. These staggering mortality rates are explained by co-occurring chronic conditions including heart disease, diabetes, cardio-respiratory ailments and infectious diseases such as pneumonia or influenza. Although there are numerous explanations for the co-morbidity of these diseases, it is evident that persons with severe mental disorders receive little – if any – direct treatment for co-occurring chronic diseases and recommends integration of physical and mental health care in one setting.

Your legislation includes provisions that would co-locate primary care and specialty medical services in Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other behavioral health providers across the United States. These agencies do not currently possess the resources to integrate mental health and primary care services at a single community site. The Community Mental Health Services Improvement Act also authorizes – and provides start up financing for – a new demonstration initiative that would integrate substance abuse treatment into CMHCs. Mental health, substance abuse, and chronic disease services should not be provided in silos. Co-locating care will increase the likelihood that individuals with mental illness will access the physical health care they need.

These two new programs could spur the broader systemic changes that are needed to address the health care crisis currently confronting Americans with severe mental illnesses.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. TFAH looks forward to working with you on this and other public health matters in the future. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Richard Hamburg at 202-223-9876 or Dara Alpert at 202-223-9870 ext. 20.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Levi', is written over the typed name.

Jeffrey Levi, PhD
Executive Director