

September 2009

Key Contacts Network: Now is the Time to Get More Involved

Key Contacts,

There is no doubt that the U.S. lost an incredible public servant last week with the passing of Senator Kennedy. He was a passionate advocate for those that were underserved and disadvantaged. During his tenure in the U.S. Senate, he authored over 2,500 bills and led the charge on numerous efforts to improve health care, education, and many other domestic and foreign policy concerns.

His long-standing advocacy for individuals with behavioral health conditions and other disabilities has left a remarkable legacy. His leadership in the Senate led to the passage of legislation that has undoubtedly increased opportunities for individuals with mental health and substance use problems:

- Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act
- American with Disabilities Act
- Mental Health Parity Act
- Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA))
- Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act

In addition, his leadership in the Senate and outspoken support of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program (WIC), and the Meals on Wheels Program has assisted millions of adults and children to gain access to needed health care and social services. You can read more about Senator Kennedy's legislative accomplishments [online](#).

As we look to the return of Congress and the continuation of the health care reform debate, the question remains, **who amongst our elected officials will join the cause of advocating for the clients you serve?** There are several Members of Congress who have shown their dedication to individuals with behavioral health conditions, but we need to help them by increasing the number of elected officials that are vocal supporters of community mental health and addiction services.

Are your Members of Congress aware of the services you provide? Do they understand the value you bring to the constituents they serve?

Now is the Time to Get More Involved!

I strongly urge you to **submit an editorial to your local newspaper**, emphasizing the importance of passing a health care reform package that comprehensively includes addiction and mental health services, and send a copy to your elected officials. **We have resources to help you** - including a template editorial, training videos, and a

video tutorial on the Congressional process for health care reform legislation - on the Key Contacts page of the National Council's [website](#).

Having an editorial in a local newspaper is important for several reasons: 1) It brings public attention to your organization; 2) It positions you as a leader in your community; 2) It reinforces your efforts to be viewed as a resource to your elected officials on these issues; 4) It shows your elected officials that they have constituents that are passionate about these issues. All of these things are excellent stepping stones to encourage your elected officials to champion bills that support individuals with mental health and substance use problems. During key moments during the upcoming Congressional debate, we'll be contacting you on an individual basis, requesting your help to participate in strategic advocacy to your Members of Congress. Please stay tuned for our communications and share with us a copy of your editorials or any other communications you have with your elected officials.

As always, please [let us know](#) if you need assistance with getting involved. **Thank you for participating in the National Council's Key Contacts Network** - your involvement is a necessary component of successful advocacy.

Sincerely,

Mohini Venkatesh
Director, Federal & State Policy