



The Jewish Federations®  
Washington Office  
OF NORTH AMERICA

THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE.  
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

A PRODUCT OF THE JFNA STRATEGIC HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER

## **SUPPORT FEDERAL MENTAL HEALTH REFORM EFFORTS**

**Please urge your Senators to pass the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680) without delay.**

There is now unprecedented agreement in Congress on the need for mental health reform. The Senate is poised to consider a comprehensive mental health reform initiative, the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680) introduced by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Patty Murray (D-WA). Senate deliberations come on the heels of the House of Representatives passing its version of mental health reform legislation, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act (H.R. 2646), by an overwhelming vote of 422-2 on July 6th. Originally introduced three years ago by Representatives Tim Murphy (R-PA) and Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), the House bill underwent substantial revision as cost became an issue. Both bills contain a number of important provisions that would, if enacted, represent a major step forward in improving the nation's behavioral healthcare system **and would have major implications for Jewish federation partner agencies. Please urge your Senators to pass comprehensive mental health reform without delay.**

### **Mental Health Reform is Urgently Needed**

- Twenty-six percent of Americans ages 18 and older – about 40 million people -- have a diagnosable mental illness in a given year.
- Suicide rates have increased 25% in the last 15 years. The number of suicides has been rising among adolescents and youth, middle aged Americans, and older adults.
- Six million patients cared for by community and residential providers also suffer from a high incidence of co-occurring health disorders, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and asthma.

### **The House Bill**

The House bill contains a number of important changes that address these challenges. The House bill:

- Codifies limited Medicaid coverage for adult inpatient mental health care;
- Strengthens community crisis response;
- Helps support the integration of primary health and mental health care by allowing both mental health and primary care services to be billed on the same day, and by allowing children to receive medically necessary healthcare services while they are undergoing inpatient mental health treatment;
- Requires a federal study of mental health and substance abuse parity;
- Reauthorizes multiple grant programs, including suicide prevention programs; and
- Improves coordination between government agencies that serve people with mental illness.

## **The Senate Bill**

The Senate bill was approved by the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee in April, and now awaits action by the full Senate. Although there are some important differences between the House and Senate bills, the Senate version also:

- Provides resources for community crisis response;
- Promotes the integration of primary health and mental health care;
- Provides resources for suicide prevention;
- Addresses enforcement of mental health parity and requires a federal study; and
- Improves coordination across federal agencies that serve people with mental health needs.

JFNA is disappointed that both the House and Senate bills failed to include federal funding for Behavioral Health Information Technology (BHIT) to encourage adoption of BHIT by behavioral health providers, and failed to expand a small but important pilot program that provides federal funds to certified community behavioral health clinics, known as the Excellence in Mental Health Act. Some Jewish family service agencies that provide mental health counseling might be eligible for funding under this initiative.

The comprehensive mental health reform bills, nevertheless, contain important measures to improve the nation's behavioral healthcare system. **If enacted, this legislation would have important implications for Jewish federation partner agencies. Please urge your Senators to pass comprehensive mental health reform without delay.**

**Please urge your Senators to pass comprehensive mental health reform without delay.** Click [here](#) to see if your Senator is a co-sponsor.

**For further information, please contact:**

**Jonathan Westin, Senior Director, Health Initiatives** at  
(202) 736-5860 or [jonathan.westin@jewishfederations.org](mailto:jonathan.westin@jewishfederations.org)

**Elizabeth Cullen, Counsel for Health Policy, Strategic Health Resource Center** at  
(202) 736-5887 or [elizabeth.cullen@jewishfederations.org](mailto:elizabeth.cullen@jewishfederations.org)