

VIA FAX: 202/456-3463

January 10, 2013

Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Biden,

As an association representing behavioral healthcare provider organizations and professionals, the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems (NAPHS) shares your interest in helping our country prevent tragedies such as that in Newtown, CT. We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our perspective as you convene a task force on this issue.

Founded in 1933, NAPHS advocates for behavioral health and represents provider systems that are committed to the delivery of responsive, accountable, and clinically effective prevention, treatment, and care for children, adolescents, adults, and older adults with mental and substance use disorders. Our members are behavioral healthcare provider organizations, including more than 700 psychiatric hospitals, general hospital psychiatric and addiction treatment units, residential treatment centers, youth services organizations, outpatient networks, and other providers of care. Our members deliver all levels of care, including inpatient care, residential treatment, partial hospitalization services, and outpatient services.

We believe that it is time to help people with mental and addictive disorders. As the national dialogue focuses on ways public policy can help individuals and families facing mental and addictive disorders, we urge the Administration and Congress to focus on the following priority areas:

1. **Make sure that every American has **coverage** for mental and addictive disorders at parity with coverage for other medical conditions.**
2. **Ensure that every American has **access** to all levels of behavioral health care (inpatient – intermediate – outpatient) so that they can get the right help, at the right time, in the right setting.** Coverage – without access to services – prevents people from receiving needed care. Access means that services must be available (with sufficient and qualified workforce to provide the services), must be affordable, must be appropriate for the individual's needs, and must have adequate funding (so that providers are adequately reimbursed so they can continue to provide services). In a recent national survey conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, Americans overwhelmingly agreed that mental health and addiction treatment services “should be covered and part of any basic private healthcare plan.”
3. **Provide additional **resources** to fund gaps in community services.**

To accomplish these goals, we specifically recommend that Congress and the Administration:

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- **Issue a final rule for the federal parity law** (the *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008*). The final rule should clarify that parity applies to all levels of care (inpatient – intermediate – outpatient).
- **Ensure that the essential health benefits in the *Affordable Care Act* – which include mental health/addiction treatment as one of 10 categories of essential benefits – are carefully and fully implemented.**
- **Provide additional funding for community-based services** to help fill gaps in the continuum of care that is needed to best serve individuals with mental and addictive disorders.

Mental and addictive disorders affect millions of Americans of all ages. Ensuring adequate coverage, access, and resources will go a long way toward ensuring that Americans with these disorders get the right help, at the right time, in the right setting.

Please contact us if we can provide additional background or assistance. We appreciate your efforts to analyze and act.

Sincerely,

/s/

Mark Covall
President/CEO