

March 13, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

The undersigned organizations applaud your strong commitment to healthcare reform and share your urgency to address healthcare in 2009. We agree with your view that to succeed, reform must be comprehensive. It must provide universal coverage and access to necessary care, and utilize evidence-based strategies to improve public health and reduce costs. To accomplish our shared goals, it is imperative that adequate and equitable health responses to addiction and mental illness be part of any healthcare reform proposals that are developed and enacted on the federal level.

Millions of Americans suffer from untreated mental illness and/or addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Medical experts agree that addiction and mental illnesses are chronic diseases that can be prevented and treated effectively. We appreciate your strong support of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 in the U.S. Senate and your support as a presidential candidate for inclusion of mental health and addiction parity principles in national healthcare reform.

Unfortunately, less than half of the 15 million adults with serious mental illness received treatment or counseling for a mental health problem and only 18 percent of the 22.6 million people in need of help for an alcohol and/or drug use problem received any form of treatment in the past year. The financial costs and social consequences of untreated addiction and mental illness to families and communities, child welfare and criminal justice systems, the healthcare system, and to our nation as a whole are staggering. For example:

- Mental health and addictive disorders are the leading cause of combined death and disability for women and the second leading cause for men.
- Untreated addiction and mental illness annually cost the U.S. \$171 billion in lost productivity.
- Individuals with untreated mental illnesses and/or addictive disorders are significantly overrepresented in jails and prisons. Children with untreated mental health and/or substance use problems are at high risk for school failure and entrance into the juvenile justice system.
- Approximately 120,000 deaths each year are due to harmful drug and alcohol use in the U.S., not including deaths from drug-related accidents, or associated diseases such as drug injection-transmitted HIV/AIDS.
- Adults with serious mental illness die on average 25 years sooner than those who do not have a mental illness, mainly due to untreated health conditions. Each year in America 32,000 individuals die by suicide.
- Individuals suffering with mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction often suffer from other chronic health conditions such as obesity, heart disease, pulmonary disorders, and hypertension.

They are less likely to have access to health insurance and more likely to use hospital emergency rooms and other high cost and less effective alternatives to ongoing medical care.

While the impact of untreated addiction and mental illness in this country is substantial, so are the opportunities to lower healthcare costs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans, by providing them with access to critical treatment and recovery services and expanding prevention efforts. Mental illness and addiction are preventable and treatable diseases, just like cancer, diabetes, and asthma. A large body of evidence-based studies shows that treatment for both addiction and mental illness is as effective as the treatment of other chronic diseases and results in comparable cost savings. Indeed, preventing and treating mental illness and addiction are essential to promoting wellness and health and reducing health care costs.

For these reasons, it is essential that the full continuum of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery services are effectively incorporated into healthcare reform. Specifically, successful reform of the national healthcare system must:

- Include equitable and adequate coverage of addiction and mental health treatment and recovery support services;
- Require all public and private health insurance to cover these critical treatment and recovery services, and promote comprehensive communitywide prevention, early intervention, recovery and research for adults and youth;
- Make addiction and mental health services fully available to all those in need, including family members.

We are grateful for your strong leadership and we are optimistic that, for the first time, every American will soon have access to quality, affordable health coverage, including coverage for the full continuum of life-saving mental health and drug and alcohol addiction prevention and care. We look forward to working with you and your administration to finally make comprehensive healthcare reform a reality.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Advocates for Recovery through Medicine
Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Correctional Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Hospital Association
American Humane Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse (AMERSA)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Campaign for Mental Health Reform

Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy, Department of Health Policy, George Washington University
Medical Center
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
Entertainment Industries Council, Inc
Faces & Voices of Recovery
FedCure (Federal Chapter of Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants)
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
Friends of SAMHSA
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church
Hazelden
Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
International Community Corrections Association
International CURE
International Union of Police Associations
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Justice Policy Institute
Legal Action Center
Mental Health America
NAACP
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc
National AIDS Housing Coalition
National Alliance of Methadone Advocates (NAMA)
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Children of Alcoholics
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders – ANAD
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Drug Court Professionals
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Association on Alcohol, Drugs and Disability
National Coalition of 100 Black Women
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
National Criminal Justice Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH)
National Medical Association, Psychiatry Section

Oxford House, Inc.
Partnership for a Drug-Free America
State Associations of Addiction Services
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
The Rebecca Project for Human Rights
Therapeutic Communities of America
U.S. Recovery Delegates
United Jewish Communities (UJC)
United Neighborhood Centers of America
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA)
Wellstone Action
Witness Justice

State and Local Organizations

Addiction Treatment Advocates of New Jersey
Advocates for Recovery
Alabama CURE
Alcoholism Council of New York (NCADD affiliate)
Arapahoe House, Inc
Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Arkansas Association of Substance Abuse Treatment Programs
Association of Persons Affected by Addiction
Association of Substance Abuse Programs of Texas
Behavioral Health Services Association of South Carolina
California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives (CAADPE)
California Certification Board of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors
California Foundation for the Advancement of Addiction Professionals
Coalition of Louisiana Addition and Prevention Service Providers
Colorado Association of Alcohol and Drug Service Providers
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
Colorado-CURE
Community Alliance on Prisons, Honolulu, Hawaii
Community Partnership of Southern Arizona
Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
Council on Addictions of New York State, Inc. (CANYS)
Council on Alcoholism and Addictions of the Finger Lakes
County Alcohol & Drug Program Administrators Association of California
Crossroads Coalition, Inc.
CURE IL
DC Recovery Community Alliance
Delaware Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Howard University College of Medicine and Hospital
DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area
Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania
Drug and Alcohol Treatment Association of Rhode Island
El Paso Alliance, Inc.
Faces and Voices of Recovery SC
Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association
Fortune Society Long Island City, New York
Friends of Recovery of Delaware and Otsego Counties, Inc. (FOR-DO)
Friends of Recovery-New York

Georgia Association of Community Providers
Grace After Fire
Haymarket Center
Illinois Alcoholism & Drug Dependence Association (IADDA)
Indiana Association of Substance Abuse Providers
Iowa Behavioral Health Association
Kansas Association of Addiction Professionals
Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs
Maryland Addictions Director's Council
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Corporations of Massachusetts
Mental Health Association of the District of Columbia
Message Carriers of Pennsylvania, Inc.
Michigan Association of Licensed Substance Abuse Organizations
Minnesota Association of Resources for Recovery & Chemical Health
Mississippi Association of Addiction Services
Mississippi CURE Inc.
Missouri Addiction Services Providers Association
Montana Addiction Service Providers
Mountain View Prevention Services, Inc.
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (NCADA) – St. Louis Area
NC-CURE
Nebraska Association of Behavioral Health Organizations
Nevada Alliance for Addictive Disorders, Advocacy, Prevention and Treatment Services
New Hampshire Alcohol & Other Drug Service Providers Association
New York State Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers
North Carolina Association for Behavioral Health Care
North Dakota Addiction Treatment Providers Coalition
Northern Ohio Recovery Association
Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers
Oklahoma Substance Abuse Services Alliance
Oregon Prevention, Education, and Recovery Association
PAR-People Advocating Recovery
Psychotherapy & Organizational Development, LLC
Recovery Center - The Council on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse of Sullivan County
Restoring Dignity, Inc.
Schoharie County Council on Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Inc.
Seaway Valley Prevention Council
South Carolina Reentry Initiative (SCRI)
South Dakota Council of Substance Abuse Directors, Inc.
South Suburban Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse
Southland Health Care Forum
St. James Hospital and Health Centers
Stepping Stone of San Diego
Substance Abuse Directors Association of Alaska, Inc.
Tarzana Treatment Centers Inc. (TTC)
TASC, Inc
Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug & other Addiction Services (TAADAS)
The Behavioral Health Committee of the Utah Association of Counties
The Woman's Heart
Vermont Association of Addiction Treatment Programs
Virginia Association of Drug & Alcohol Programs (VADAP)
Washington Association of Alcoholism & Addictions Programs
Washington Psychiatric Society
WestCare Foundation

Cc: Vice President of the United States Joe Biden
Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Nominee for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Chief Gil Kerlikowske, Nominee for Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy
Ed Jurith, Acting Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy
Nancy-Ann DeParle, Director of the White House Office for Health Reform
Jeanne Lawbrew, Deputy Director of the White House Office for Health Reform
Rear Admiral Eric Broderick, Acting Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
The Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Richard Durbin, Majority Whip of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Jon Kyl, Minority Whip of the U.S. Senate
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable James Clyburn, Majority Whip of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable John Boehner, Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Eric Cantor, Minority Whip of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Edward Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
The Honorable Mike Enzi, Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable John Dingell, Chair Emeritus of the House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee
The Honorable Nathan Deal, Ranking Member of the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee
The Honorable Charles Rangel, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Dave Camp, Ranking Member of the House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Wally Herger, Ranking Member of the House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Fortney "Pete" Stark, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health
The Honorable George Miller, Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee
The Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon, Ranking Member of the House Education and Labor Committee
The Honorable Robert Andrews, Chair of the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
The Honorable John Kline, Ranking Member of the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions