

October 31, 2007

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman  
The Honorable Michael B. Enzi, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy and Senator Enzi:

The undersigned health, mental health, and aging organizations are writing to urge you to support the inclusion of the Positive Aging Act of 2007 (S. 982) in the bill to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This important legislation will improve access to quality mental health care for older adults by supporting the integration of mental health services into primary care and community settings where older adults reside and receive services.

An estimated 20 percent of community-based older adults in the U.S. have a mental health problem. These disorders can have a significant impact on both physical and mental health, often leading to increases in disease, disability, and mortality. In fact, white men age 80 and older currently have the highest rates of suicide in our country and depression is the foremost risk factor. Evidence suggests that up to 75 percent of older adults who die by suicide have visited a primary care professional within 30 days of their death. Although effective treatments exist, the mental health needs of many older Americans go unrecognized and untreated because of poorly integrated systems of care to address the physical and mental health needs of seniors. These missed opportunities to diagnose and treat mental disorders are taking a significant toll on older adults and increasing the burden on families, caregivers, and our health care system.

In order to ensure that our seniors do not continue to fall through the cracks, we urge you to include the provisions of the Positive Aging Act of 2007 in the bill to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Positive Aging Act of 2007 takes several important steps toward improving access to quality mental health care for older adults, including supporting demonstration projects to integrate mental health services into primary care settings; supporting grants for community-based mental health treatment outreach teams; designating a Deputy Director for Older Adult Mental Health Services in the Center for Mental Health Services; and including representatives of older Americans or their families and geriatric mental health professionals on the Advisory Council for the Center for Mental Health Services.

We urge you to make the mental health and well being of older Americans a priority by including the Positive Aging Act of 2007 in the bill to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Sincerely,

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Psychotherapy Association  
American Society on Aging  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York  
Gerontological Society of America  
Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago  
Kansas Mental Health and Aging Coalition  
Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)  
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Units on Aging  
National Council on Aging  
New York Academy of Medicine  
Oklahoma Mental Health and Aging Coalition  
Older Women's League  
Prairie View, Inc.  
Society of Clinical Geropsychology  
Therapeutic Communities of America  
United Jewish Communities  
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association