



Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014

Sponsored by Congressman Ron Barber (AZ)

Original Cosponsors: Rep. Diana DeGette (CO), Rep. Doris Matsui (CA), Rep. Grace Napolitano (CA), and Rep. Paul Tonko (NY)

Organizational Support: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Mental Health America, National Association for Rural Mental Health, National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American Mental Health Counselors Association, American Association on Health and Disability, National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates, National Association of School Psychologists, National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery, The Trevor Project

Legislative Summary

Our nation must renew our commitment to mental health to improve the lives of individuals and families impacted by mental illness. Building on policies that are supported by the mental health community and our Republican and Democratic colleagues, we have introduced the *Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014* to maximize the access of individuals with mental illness to community-based services and strengthen the impact of those services. The legislation continues critical mental health programs, makes new investments in prevention and early intervention, and advances mental illness research. Additionally, we focus particular attention on the mental health needs of youth, service members and veterans, Native Americans, and older Americans.

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TITLE I - White House Office of Mental Health Policy

We recognize that there remains a critical gap in mental health services across our nation. That's why we need a national strategy to increase access to mental health services, maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of mental health programs and research, and reduce the impact of mental illness in our communities.

Title I of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Create a White House Office of Mental Health Policy that is responsible for developing and implementing a National Strategy for Mental Health;
- Establish a Mental Health Advisory Board of individuals with mental illness, parents and guardians of individuals with mental illness, mental health professionals, advocates, and others to advise the federal government on ways to improve mental health services and outcomes; and
- Ensure collaboration between mental health programs and services across federal, state, and local agencies.

TITLE II - Strengthening and Investing in SAMHSA Programs

We must continue to invest in the mission of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) that was created to improve access to quality mental health and substance abuse services to those who need them most. This legislation reauthorizes critical programs for community-based mental health services. It also puts in place new oversight and reporting requirements to ensure that every federal program brings real outcomes for the individuals and families who depend on them.

Title II of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Reauthorize major programs and services under SAMHSA that provide comprehensive, community-based mental health services through Fiscal Year 2019;
- Reauthorize the Garrett Lee Smith Act for suicide prevention;
- Authorize mental health awareness training grants to improve mental health awareness;
- Create a national media campaign to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness; and
- Require a report on evidence based mental health practices to better serve older Americans.

TITLE III - Improving Medicaid and Medicare Mental Health Services

Medicaid and Medicare combined are the largest source of funding of mental health services in our country. We can do more to improve mental health outcomes under these programs, beginning with providing parity of mental health services and increasing access to community-based services and treatment.

Title III of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Codify access to prescription medications for serious mental illness under Medicare Part D;
- Ensure same-day payment under Medicaid for a qualifying mental health service or primary care service;
- Eliminate the 190 day lifetime limit on inpatient psychiatric hospital care under Medicare;
- Expand the home and community-based services waiver to include youth in or at risk of placement in a psychiatric residential treatment facility under Medicaid;
- Require Health and Human Services to issue a final rule on Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) plans by January 1, 2015; and
- Cover marriage and family therapy and mental health counseling under Medicare part B.

Title IV - Developing the Behavioral Health Workforce

Across our nation, we are facing critical shortages in the behavioral health workforce that are only expected to increase over the next decade. These workforce shortages threaten our ability to provide access to quality mental health care in our communities. We must address these issues through investments in the training, recruitment, and retention of behavioral health professionals for all populations.

Title IV of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Provide loan repayment funding for behavioral and mental health professionals and additional funding for mental and behavioral health education and training;
- Create a demonstration program for loan repayment for psychiatrists working under Indian Health Programs; and
- Include occupational therapists within the National Health Service Corps.

TITLE V - Improving Mental Health Research and Coordination

While research on mental illness has continued to grow and new and more effective treatments for mental illness have been developed, there is still much more work to be done. Investing in mental health research today will provide the tools we need to advance treatment and recovery tomorrow and into the future.

Title V of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Fund additional research within the National Institute of Mental Health on serious mental illness, suicide prevention, and youth mental health; and
- Expand the National Violent Death Reporting System to all 50 states.

TITLE VI - Education and Youth

Mental illness affects millions of youth across America, with 1 out of 5 children and adolescents living with a mental illness. We must do more to increase access to mental health services for youth and young adults, including in-school services and supports.

Title VI of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Provide grants for schools and communities to create comprehensive mental health programs;
- Require a GAO report on the utilization of mental health services for children, including information on access to care and referrals, availability of tools and assessments, and usage of psychotropic medications.

TITLE VII - Justice and Mental Health Collaboration

Our criminal justice system is not an alternative to a strong mental health system. We can and must do more to improve access to mental health services for people with mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system, and give our law enforcement officers the tools they need to identify and respond to individuals in crisis. The Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act (JMCA) reauthorizes the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act that was signed into law in 2004 to help states and counties design and implement collaborative efforts between criminal justice and mental health systems.

Title VII of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Continue to provide support for mental health courts and crisis intervention teams, both of which save lives and money;
- Emphasize evidence-based practices that have been proven effective through empirical evidence;
- Authorize investments in veterans treatment courts, which serve arrested veterans who suffer from PTSD, substance addiction, and other mental health conditions;
- Support the development of curricula for police academies and orientations;
- Increase focus on corrections-based programs, like transitional services that reduce recidivism rates and screening practices that identify inmates with mental health conditions; and
- Give local officials greater control over program participation eligibility.

TITLE VIII - Behavioral Health Information Technology

A strong mental health system depends upon the ability to coordinate patient care and services. By bringing behavioral health providers into the electronic health record network, we can improve mental health and addiction treatment outcomes, while reducing adverse drug-to-drug interactions and emergency room visits.

Title VIII of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Extend Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for use of electronic health records (EHRs) to mental health professional facilities; and
- Make mental health and addiction treatment providers eligible for HITECH Act technical assistance.

TITLE IX - Service Members and Veterans Mental Health

America's veterans have made every sacrifice to defend our nation and protect our freedoms. We have a responsibility to do all we can to make sure they have the services and supports they need in the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Veterans Health Administration (VA), including access to mental health care and professionals in their communities.

Title IX of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Provide an individual with a mental health assessment before the individual enlists in the Armed Forces or is commissioned as an officer in the Armed Forces;
- Extend special combat eligibility for mental health care for veterans;
- Improve collaboration between the VA and DOD; and
- Increase the number of mental health professionals in the VA.

TITLE X - Making Parity Work

It has been a long journey to ensuring that insurance companies treat mental health equally and we still have more work to do. We support the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) that ends discrimination against individuals seeking services for mental health and substance use disorders. We are committed to ensuring that mental health and substance use disorder parity is fully implemented and enforced.

Title X of the *Strengthening Mental Health in our Communities Act* would:

- Require a GAO Study on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Enforcement Efforts;
- Report to Congress on Federal Assistance to State Insurance Regulators Regarding Mental Health and Substance Use Parity Enforcement; and
- Require the Secretary of Labor to coordinate with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to prepare annual detailed reports of parity compliance activities in each state.