

February 23, 2018

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services

Dear Secretary Azar:

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) published the first report of the Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee (ISMICC), *The Way Forward: Federal Action for a System That Works for All People Living With SMI and SED and Their Families and Caregivers*, on December 14, 2017. The undersigned national mental health and substance use stakeholder organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) are interested in learning more about your department's next steps and how our organizations can support your efforts with implementation of the report's recommendations in the coming year.

The MHLG is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, payers and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to effective mental health and addiction care. Together, on behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental health and addiction disorders, their families, and communities, we advocate for public policies and funding to improve access to high-quality health care through prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery services and supports.

The MHLG appreciates your department's participation in the ISMICC to date, as mandated by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act of 2016. As you know, Section 6031 of the Act established the ISMICC as a committee composed of federal representatives and non-federal members, with a mandate to report back their findings on several issues to Congress by December 14, 2017. The report to Congress contained forty-five recommendations for interdepartmental coordination and federal leadership across five focus areas, but noted that "these recommendations do not represent federal policy, and the federal departments represented on the ISMICC have not reviewed the recommendations to determine what role they could play in the future activities of the departments."

Following this report, the MHLG is interested in the steps your department is considering to align the ISMICC reports and activities with federal policy. We hope that your department will be able to share its steps at its earliest convenience, so that our organizations may most effectively support your work over the course of the year. In particular, we urge attention to grantmaking and regulatory policies to improve coordination on the ground and reinforce evidence-based practice, such as coordination across HHS grantees for early identification and intervention for serious mental illnesses

and serious emotional disturbances, or improved enforcement of mental health parity to reduce costs to the American people.

Many of our organizations worked with Congress to develop and eventually pass this landmark law, and now work to support the implementation of its provisions. We share your goal of improving outcomes and reducing costs through effective coordination of services and supports for individuals with serious mental illnesses and serious emotional disturbances, and stand ready to assist in realizing the goals of the 21st Century Cures Act. We look forward to working with you on this important endeavor and will follow up with your department soon.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association on Health and Disability

American Dance Therapy Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychoanalytic Association

American Psychological Association

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Children and Adults with ADD (CHADD)

Cities Thrive Coalition

Clinical Social Work Association

Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

EMDR International Association

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

The Jewish Federations of North America

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability  
Directors

National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems

National Association of Social Workers

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Board for Certified Counselors

National Center for Child Traumatic Stress

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

National League for Nursing

National Register of Health Service Psychologists