

# Mental Health Liaison Group

January 25, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families and communities, the undersigned mental health organizations want to thank you, Vice President Biden and his task force highlighting the importance of mental health as part of your efforts to respond to the Newtown tragedy and recent events.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, parents and family members, advocates, providers, and mental health experts dedicated to building better lives for millions of Americans affected by mental illness. We look forward to working with you and your administration in reducing violence and accessing effective mental health care through these recommendations.

1. **Improve prevention, early identification, and intervention in mental health care.** It is well-documented that prevention programs, social support and timely mental health treatment can promote well-being and prevent crises. Too often, what in hindsight are clear signs of the need for mental health care and supportive services are not identified until after a crisis occurs.
2. **Provide education and training to school personnel, law enforcement, families, primary care physicians, and members of the community to educate them about how to identify and respond compassionately to youth and adults experiencing health crisis and recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.** Too often those in a position to help do not know what to do when a child or adult experiences a crisis or manifests the early signs and symptoms of mental illness.
3. **Support outreach programs including those delivered by peers, that engage and support people with mental illness, help them access care and services, and support their recovery.**
4. **Implement school-based mental health services and supports.** We are clearly not addressing the needs of students struggling with mental health conditions in many of our nation's schools.
5. **Increase the qualified mental health workforce.** Throughout the nation, there are critical shortages in the availability of qualified mental health professionals. In many communities, children and adults are placed on long waiting lists to access mental health services.
6. **Fully implement key provisions of the *Affordable Care Act (ACA)* including mental health and addictions parity requirements.** We are grateful for your leadership on health care and urge continued leadership in ensuring full and effective implementation of the ACA.

7. **Protect federal funding of Medicaid.** Youth and adults with mental illnesses are among the largest, most important class of Medicaid beneficiaries. Forty-eight percent of all public mental health services in America are funded through Medicaid. Reductions in federal funding of Medicaid would have a devastating impact on people with mental illnesses.
8. **Protect federal funding for mental health supports and services.** We encourage the Administration to protect and increase funding for mental health supports and services in FY2014.

Mr. President, MHLG thanks you for your leadership and stands ready to work with you and the Administration on the goal of improving mental health care in America. We invite you to contact our work group co-chairs, Nancy Trenti at 202/222-5530 Ron Honberg at 703/516-7972, for comments or with questions.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Center for Clinical Social Work  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49  
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems

National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
School Social Work Association of America  
The Trevor Project  
Witness Justice