

Mental Health Liaison Group

December 2, 2010

Mr. Eugene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The undersigned national organizations commend you on the selection of a talented and accomplished array of individuals to serve on the new National Health Care Workforce Commission, which was created by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. However, we are concerned about the lack of representation for mental health, addiction and behavioral health given the Commission's critical role in influencing national policy regarding the nation's health care workforce. Accordingly, we respectfully request that at least one professional from the fields of mental and behavioral health and addictions be added to the Commission next year when nominees for positions are once again sought and that such representation continue into the future.

Mental health, addiction and behavioral health professionals provide vital services to address mental disorders and the behavioral aspects of chronic illnesses, including prevention, assessment, early intervention, and treatment. In fact, modifiable behavioral factors (e.g., smoking, improper diet, and inadequate physical activity) significantly contribute to the leading causes of chronic health conditions and mortality in the United States. These behavior-linked health conditions, including heart disease and diabetes, account for nearly 75% of our nation's health care spending. In addition, mental disorders, particularly depression, are one of the primary causes of disease burden world-wide. As a result, new and successful models of health care practice include the integration of mental health, addiction and behavioral health assessments and interventions with physical health treatments. Mental health, addiction and behavioral health professionals are especially effective in working with other health professionals as part of interdisciplinary health care teams in a variety of health care settings to provide seamless, cost-effective, and quality health care.

It is critical for policymakers to determine whether the demand for mental health, addiction and behavioral health professionals is currently being met and is projected to be met in the future. It is also important to identify and address any barriers so as to enhance the core participation of these professionals in our nation's reformed health care system.

Thank you in advance for your attention to our request to ensure the future inclusion of mental health, addiction and behavioral health professionals among the members of the National Health Care Workforce Commission.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work *
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation *
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Humane Association *
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine *
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy *
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies *
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

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National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol & Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Problem Gambling *
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health *
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America *
School Social Work Association of America
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
Union for Reform Judaism *
U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
Witness Justice

** not a MHLG member*