



AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION



American  
Mental  
Health  
Counselors  
Association

July 25, 2007

The Honorable Charles Rangel  
Chairman  
House Ways & Means Committee  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rangel:

We are writing on behalf of the American Counseling Association and the American Mental Health Counselors Association, the nation's leading non-profit organizations representing the counseling profession, to express our strong support for H.R. 3162, the "Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007." We applaud your leadership in introducing this legislation, and urge its swift approval by the House Ways & Means Committee and passage by the full House of Representatives. ACA and AMHCA support reauthorization and expansion of the vitally important State Children's Health Insurance Program, as well as efforts to protect Medicare's future by reducing unnecessary overpayments to private fee-for-service plans and continuing to update the Medicare benefit package.

We are particularly supportive of the legislation's establishment of Medicare reimbursement for licensed professional counselors for medically-necessary mental health services. This step, along with the legislation's elimination of the discriminatory 50 percent copayment requirement for outpatient mental health services under Medicare, will significantly improve beneficiaries' access to mental health care treatment. Professional counselors are master's-degreed mental health specialists, licensed in 49 states and the District of Columbia under education and training requirements on par with those of providers currently recognized under Medicare.

We firmly believe that any effort to increase Medicare beneficiaries' access to effective mental health care must include recognition of the more than 100,000 licensed professional counselors across the country. According to data from the National Institute of Mental Health, older Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide, and the Administration on Aging has reported that less than 3 percent of older Americans report seeing mental health professionals for treatment, the smallest percentage of any age group.

Insurance coverage of licensed professional counselors as mental health care providers is not a new idea: private health plans have been covering counselors on their panels for years, and laws enacted in 21 states require health plans to either cover counselors' services or offer such coverage. Twice within the last three years the Senate has passed legislation establishing Medicare coverage of counselors. Medicare coverage of counselors would also be established under several bills now pending before the House, including H.R. 1663, the "Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act," introduced by Ways & Means Health

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Subcommittee Chairman Pete Stark (D-CA); H.R. 1588, the "Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act," sponsored by Representatives Barbara Cubin (R-WY) and Bart Gordon (D-TN); H.R. 2860, the "Health Care Access and Rural Equity Act of 2007," introduced by Representatives Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) and Greg Walden (R-OR); and H.R. 3014, the "Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007," introduced by Representative Hilda Solis (D-CA).

Thank you for your leadership in developing and promoting the CHAMP Act. Our organizations are working to promote the legislation's enactment, and would be happy to be of assistance in your further work on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Brian S. Canfield, Ed.D.  
President  
American Counseling Association



Gary Gintner, Ph.D., LPC  
President  
American Mental Health Counselors Association

cc: Health Subcommittee Chairman Pete Stark  
House Ways & Means Committee