

STATEMENT

**From Mark Covall, President/CEO,
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems**

on signing into law of
The [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#) (H.R.3590)¹
March 23, 2010

Reform Law Includes Components Important to Americans Facing Mental and Addictive Disorders

Today President Barack Obama signed into law *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (H.R.3590). As an association representing behavioral healthcare professionals and organizations, we are committed to improving the lives of people of all ages experiencing psychiatric and substance use disorders. This historic legislation offers hope and help in a number of ways.

First, this law **will extend health coverage to millions of Americans** who – until now – have been left outside our healthcare system. Reducing the ranks of the uninsured is one of the most critical steps that we can take as a nation to promote health and wellness. The law will provide mechanisms to improve competition and choice in the insurance marketplace, and it will reduce administrative burdens.

Second, the law **specifically includes mental health and substance abuse benefits in the essential benefit package** that will be offered through new health exchanges for small businesses and the individual market. This provision recognizes that behavioral health is integral to overall health – a key concept that is fundamental to improving the overall well-being of our nation.

Third, this law **will launch a major demonstration program** (known as the “IMD/EMTALA demonstration”) **to solve some of the most challenging problems in accessing emergency psychiatric care.** It will expand the number of emergency inpatient psychiatric care beds available in communities by establishing a three-year, \$75 million demonstration project allowing states to cover patients in freestanding psychiatric hospitals and to receive federal Medicaid matching payments for patients ages 21 through 64. The intent is to demonstrate that covering patients in these hospitals will improve timely access to emergency psychiatric care, reduce the burden on overcrowded emergency rooms, and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of inpatient psychiatric care. The National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems and its members have been strong advocates of this IMD/EMTALA demonstration, which has been backed by 26 additional national healthcare organizations, including the American Hospital Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, American Psychiatric Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, and Emergency Nurses Association.

We applaud the President and Congress for making health care – including care for mental and substance use disorders – accessible to many more Americans. This law provides a framework to start the process of building an improved healthcare system, but it is only a beginning step that will continue to be improved over time. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to continue to find ways to improve our overall healthcare system – particularly for the millions of Americans facing severe and persistent mental and substance use disorders.

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¹ The U.S. Senate is now also considering the [Reconciliation Act of 2010](#) (H.R.4872), a package of changes to H.R.3590.