

**STATEMENT
ON PASSAGE OF
*THE PAUL WELLSTONE AND PETE DOMENICI
MENTAL HEALTH PARITY AND ADDICTION EQUITY ACT OF 2008***

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In a historic win for all Americans, the United States Congress today passed legislation that is a major civil rights victory for individuals who experience serious emotional and substance use disorders. The *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008* (which was included in a larger national financial rescue package sent to President Bush for signature) requires health insurance plans that offer mental health and addiction coverage to provide that coverage on par with financial and treatment coverage offered for other physical illnesses. The protections of this bill extend to Americans in health plans of 51 or more employees, including – for the first time – those in self-insured employer health plans.

As an association representing behavioral healthcare organizations, professionals, and employers, the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems (NAPHS) applauds this historic action. Mental health is integral to overall health, and this measure goes a long way toward putting mental health and addiction treatment on equal footing with that for all other medical conditions.

This is a win for all of us. Mental illnesses constitute the second leading cause of disability and premature death in the United States. With improved coverage, consumers and families now have access to essential services. By taking care of behavioral healthcare problems early and appropriately, the long-term costs to employers – and to society – are reduced. For providers, mental health parity is a critical step in ensuring that those who are in greatest need will have health coverage that will give them access to the right treatment in the right setting.

Passage of mental health parity legislation was a true bipartisan effort that won the support of consumers, employers, insurers, and healthcare providers. Our particular thanks to those who introduced the original measures, including Senators Pete V. Domenici (R-NM), Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), and Michael B. Enzi (R-WY) and Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Rep. Jim Ramstad (R-MN). We thank these leaders, the House and Senate leadership, as well as the House and Senate co-sponsors for taking action to pass one of the most far-reaching and comprehensive efforts to provide fairness and equity in coverage for both mental and addictive disorders.

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