

Media Contact:
Rachel Schwalm
(717) 514-2168
rschwalm@guidelobby.com

For Immediate Release

**MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS APPLAUD
REP. MURPHY & REP. BARBER FOR INTRODUCING BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACT**

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 31, 2013 – Key mental health and addiction services organizations, including the Behavioral Health IT Coalition, today applauded Rep. Tim Murphy [R-PA] and Rep. Ron Barber [D-AZ] for introducing the bipartisan Behavioral Health Information Technology Act. This important measure, which is fully paid for, would help psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, clinical psychologists and inpatient/outpatient addiction providers qualify for incentive payments under the HITECH Act’s “Meaningful Use” program – established to encourage the adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and associated clinical quality measures to enhance patient care.

By expanding the eligibility for incentive payments beyond individual providers of mental health services to organizations like mental health clinics and inpatient psychiatric facilities, the Murphy/Barber bill can both reduce costs and save lives. In particular, it is estimated that 70% of the eight million Americans with serious mental illnesses served in the public behavioral health system have co-occurring chronic diseases including diabetes, lung cancer, cirrhosis, heart disease and emphysema. Once adopted, EHRs will enhance providers’ ability to make a diagnosis, manage drug-to-drug interactions, and view a consumer’s authorized health information during an emergency room visit for an acute psychological or psychiatric illness episode. In short, HIT forms the foundation for all efforts to better coordinate care for people with mental health and addiction disorders and this bill allows citizens with mental illnesses to receive the same level of care as people with only physical illnesses.

“The facts are clear: Our ability to improve care and reduce costs for people with psychiatric disabilities is compromised if we cannot leverage the full promise of electronic health records,” said William Daroff, vice president for public policy and director of the Washington office of the Jewish Federations of North America.

Leaving mental health and addiction providers out of the HITECH Act was a serious policy error that the Murphy/Barber legislation seeks to correct. Behavioral health providers often see patients in acute psychiatric crises when they need immediate access to services.

“Including behavioral health in health information technology will enhance the ability for psychologists and other mental health professionals to collaborate with other health providers and provide patients with comprehensive care that addresses a person’s total health,” said Katherine C. Nordal, Ph.D., executive director of the American Psychological Association Practice Organization.

“From a public policy standpoint, mental health care and addiction services are essential parts of the broader health care system,” said Mark Covall, president and CEO of the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems. “As the federal government and states have worked hard over the past decade to integrate behavioral and general health services, we can only accomplish that goal if we have the ability to share medical records with physicians and medical specialists.”

“We applaud Dr. Murphy for his leadership in introducing this critical legislation,” said Linda Rosenberg, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health. “It’s especially encouraging that the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act has such broad and deep bipartisan support at a time of widespread political polarization.”

“We are particularly pleased that the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act contains key legal safe harbor provisions for meaningful users of HIT -- whether they participate in the HITECH Act or not,” said Joel White, Executive Director of the Health IT Now Coalition. “If Congress adopts this important legislation, you will see increased adoption of EHRs nationwide, particularly in the mental and behavioral health community.”

About the Behavioral Health IT Coalition

The Behavioral Health IT Coalition is comprised of providers, public agencies and companies fighting to bring the promise of Health Information Technology to mental health and addiction services; they include the American Psychological Association, Centerstone, the National Association of Counties, the National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors, the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems, the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Council for Behavioral Health, the Jewish Federations of North America and Netsmart Technologies.

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