

August 3, 2017

The Honorable Rob Portman  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
530 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

## MEMBERS

American Psychological  
Association

Association for Behavioral  
Health and Wellness

Centerstone

Jewish Federations  
of North America

National Association of Counties

National Association of County  
Behavioral Health Directors

National Association of  
Psychiatric Health Systems

National Association of State  
Alcohol/Drug Abuse Directors

National Association  
of Social Workers

National Council for  
Behavioral Health

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## **RE: THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACT**

Dear Senator Portman and Senator Whitehouse:

On behalf of the Behavioral Health Information Technology (BHIT) Coalition, the undersigned organizations are writing to thank you for your outstanding leadership in spearheading legislation authorizing a behavioral health information technology pilot program administered by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI).

Patients with mental health and substance use disorders are now experiencing an overwhelming crisis. Prescription opioids are behind the deadliest drug overdose epidemic in U.S. history. More than 52,000 Americans died of overdoses in 2015 — an all-time record — and experts believe the numbers have continued to rise. Persons with opioid addiction also have an array of comorbid medical/surgical chronic including Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS and cirrhosis. In addition, substance use services have become both more clinically effective and complex with the introduction of medication assisted treatment.

Similarly, persons with severe mental illness experience extremely high rates of mortality and morbidity. In the absence of Electronic Health Records (EHRs), challenges in managing these patients lead to extraordinary costs. For example, a 2014 Rutgers University study of thirteen low income communities in New Jersey found that Medicaid recipients with serious mental health and addiction disorders accounted for an astounding 43.2% of all hospitalizations in these communities between 2008 and 2011, and this patient population composed 75% of all “higher users.”

These extreme circumstances call for arming psychiatric hospitals, Community Mental Health Centers, psychologists, social workers, and addiction treatment providers with the electronic tools they need to effectively manage these patients and address this emerging public health crisis. Your legislation – which authorizes a zero cost CMMI pilot program – is a key first step.

Thank you for your leadership.

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Sincerely,

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The Jewish Federations of America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association of State Alcohol/Drug Abuse Directors

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National Association for Rural Mental Health

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