



June 10, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
215 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

On behalf of the 210,000 members and 1,200 affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), I writing to offer our enthusiastic support for the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (S 3101). As the nation's largest organization representing people with serious mental illness and their families, we pleased to support this important legislation to improve the Medicare program.

NAMI is especially pleased that S 3101 includes critical beneficiary protections and improvements. Of particular importance to NAMI are proposal to improve the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit. NAMI is especially grateful for inclusion of the following provision in the legislation:

- Section 176 – A proposal brought forward by your colleague Senator Gordon Smith (S 1887) to create regulatory authority for CMS to ensure broad coverage on prescription drug plan formularies for critical life sustaining medications,
- Section 175 – A proposal authored by your colleague Senator Jay Rockefeller to allow drug plans to cover benzodiazepines in clinically appropriate circumstances such as treatment for acute mania in bipolar disorder and severe anxiety disorders,
- Section 112 – A proposal to increase the amount of allowable resources for applicants to the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) to the amount specified for full low-income subsidy (LIS) beneficiaries under Part D,
- Sections 113 and 114 – Amendments to eliminate barriers to enrollment and the current late enrollment penalty for the LIS program, and
- Section 116 – A proposal to exempt the value of a life insurance policy and in-kind support and maintenance for LIS eligibility determinations.

These reforms will help ensure broad access to medications to treat mental illness. In addition, they will ensure that additional low-income beneficiaries will be able to qualify

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for LIS and thereby avoid the “doughnut hole” coverage gap.

NAMI would also like to express our gratitude for inclusion of Senator Olympia Snowe’s proposal to address the current discriminatory 50% cost sharing requirement for outpatient mental health services under Part B. NAMI is extremely pleased that Section 102 will gradually move cost sharing for outpatient mental health services toward parity with all other medical outpatient services between 2010 and 2014.

Finally, NAMI is extremely pleased that S 3101 includes expansion of the Medicare rural hospital FLEX program to authorize grants to increase access to mental illness treatment services for veterans in rural and frontier communities (Section 121). It is critical that Congress provide additional resources for the mental health needs of veterans, particularly National Guard and Reserve troops returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries living with mental illness and their families. NAMI looks forward to working with you to ensure passage of S 3101 this year. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Fitzpatrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Michael J. Fitzpatrick, M.S.W.
Executive Director

cc: Gary Mihelish, President, NAMI Montana
Libby Artley, NAMI Billings
Tom Peluso, NAMI Bozeman
Ted Harper, NAMI Butte
Theresa Oksness, NAMI Great Falls
Liam Holton, NAMI
Boyd Roth, NAMI Flathead, Kalispell
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Dorothy Salmonson, NAMI Missoula
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