AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION PRACTICE ORGANIZATION

December 16, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Ryan and Majority Leader McConnell:

We are writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Psychological Association Practice Organization to urge Congress *not* to repeal the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA) without simultaneously replacing the law with legislation that ensures that all Americans have insurance coverage that provides access to comprehensive mental health, behavioral health, and substance use services. Our organizations comprise more than 117,500 members, who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students.

The ACA can be improved to make coverage more affordable and effective for individuals and families. Nevertheless, the law has provided high-quality health care coverage to more than 22 million previously uninsured Americans, and is investing in research and services to slow the rise in health care spending by improving population health. The ACA also takes several steps to reduce health disparities and ensure that our health care system works for everyone, regardless of their background, treatment needs, or income. One of the most important achievements of the ACA has been its expansion of coverage through Medicaid. This Federal-State partnership is a lifeline for those with mental disorders, accounting for an estimated 25% of U.S. mental health spending. Research shows that new Medicaid enrollees have higher prevalence rates than the general population for both mental health and substance use disorders.

In addition to the Medicaid expansion, many ACA provisions have helped significantly improve Americans' access to health care and mental health treatment, including the following:

- Extends protections under the *Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act* to 60 million Americans in private health insurance plans in the individual and small group markets and in Medicaid alternative benefit package plans.
- Ensures that Marketplace plans cover a standard package of essential health benefits, including mental health and substance use disorder services, emergency services, preventive and wellness services, and pregnancy, maternity, and newborn care.

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- Establishes an array of critical insurance market reforms protecting both health care consumers and providers, to ensure that health plans compete on quality and efficiency instead of avoiding risk and denying payment for services.
- Implements non-discrimination standards, prohibiting exclusions based on pre-existing conditions and discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or health status.
- Invests in research and training to integrate behavioral healthcare with primary care, develop new systems of care, and fund comparative clinical effectiveness research through the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to enable providers and patients to make better-informed health care and mental health care decisions.
- Supports a wide array of research, training, and services through the Prevention and Public Health Fund, including State, Tribal and campus youth suicide prevention programs and the Minority Fellowship Program within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Strengthens national efforts to address health disparities by improving data collection and reporting requirements, creating an office focused on minority health within several federal agencies, and establishing the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities to lead scientific research in the area.

These and many other ACA provisions are critical to maintaining Americans' health. Health insurance is a life-or-death issue. It is not the time to repeal the ACA when more Americans with mental disorders are found in prisons, jails, and on the streets than in treatment facilities, and when more Americans are dying of drug overdoses than any other form of accidental death.

We urge Congress not to repeal the ACA without simultaneously putting in place a framework of insurance protections, standards, and programs that is at least as effective as the current law in ensuring adequate access to mental and behavioral health services. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you to accomplish this vitally important goal.

Sincerely,

Susan H. McDaniel, PhD, ABPP
President

Cynthia D. Belar, PhD, ABPP
Interim Chief Executive Officer