



*National Shattering Silence Coalition (NSSC) is an alliance of diverse individuals and organizations who are uniting to ensure that mental illness, health, and criminal justice systems count those with SMI/SED, and their families in all federal, state, and local policy reforms. We are voices for the 10 million adults and 7 million children living with and dying too young from serious mental illness.*

## Oppose Medicaid Coverage for Addiction Recovery Expansion Act (S.1169, H.R.2687)

May 5, 2017

**The Honorable Richard J. Durbin**

711 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch**

Chairman, Committee on Finance  
United States Senate  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Ron Wyden**

Ranking Member, Committee on Finance  
United States Senate  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Bill Foster**

1224 Longworth HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

**The Honorable Michael Burgess**

Chairman, Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Health  
2336 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

**The Honorable Gene Green**

Ranking Member, Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Health  
2470 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen,

National Shattering Silence Coalition (NSSC) opposes the Medicaid Coverage for Addiction Recovery Expansion Act unless amended to completely repeal the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) Exclusion not only for those with substance use disorders (SUD); but also, for those who suffer from serious mental illnesses (SMI) and co-occurring SUDs.

SMI and SUD are not mutually exclusive. There is a clear connection between SUD and mental illness. 21.5 million people (ages 12 and over) battled a SUD in 2014.<sup>1</sup> 7.9 million of those people had a mental illness and a co-occurring SUD, defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as co-occurring disorders (COD).<sup>2</sup> In 2015, SAMHSA determined that fewer than 7.54% of those with COD were receiving treatment for both disorders and 55% received no treatment at all.<sup>3</sup> You will not be successful in your efforts to treat those with CODs if you don't treat *both* their SUD *and* their SMI.

Members of NSSC have found through experience and are in agreement with SAMSHA that there is about a 5-year window of opportunity, between onset of a mental disorder and co-occurring substance abuse.<sup>4</sup> Untreated SMI leads to more severe and treatment-resistant illnesses, and to the development of CODs. By far, the most common connection between untreated mental illness and substance abuse is self-medication.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, the SUD is a symptom of the SMI and would not have developed, had the patient received prompt, consistent care for their mental illness.

There are over 10 million adults living with SMI<sup>6</sup> in America. The IMD Exclusion has been discriminating against this population for 53 years. These diseases are medical diseases and must be treated with the same care and attention any other medical disease would receive.

It's well documented that there is a much poorer prognosis for those with mental illnesses who do not receive prompt, early intervention and treatment.<sup>7</sup> Every episode causes further deterioration of the brain and other organs resulting in irreparable damage.<sup>8</sup> The IMD exclusion is the primary reason for the severe shortage of psychiatric inpatient beds.<sup>9</sup> Data collected by TAC reveals that from 1955 to 2016, the number of state hospital beds in the United States had plummeted almost 97%. By 2014, 10 times more people with SMI were in prisons and jails than in state mental hospitals, a circumstance widely attributed to the shortage of beds to provide timely treatment.<sup>10</sup>

The few people with SMI lucky enough to be placed in a hospital who are only given 15 days for treatment, often quickly decompensate upon their release. Under the best of circumstances, when their illness is caught early, finding the right medication to treat SMI is a matter of trial and error. Every time a new medication is tried, it can take weeks or longer for the medication to take effect. If that medication proves to be ineffective, another medication must be tried until an effective medication is found. This process can evolve into months when a person has remained untreated for a long period of time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/disorders/co-occurring>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4695242/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cffutures.org/files/presentations/SAMHSAPerspectiveAndServiceInitiativesForChildren.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/introduction>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

<sup>7</sup> <https://mentallillnesspolicy.org/consequences/prognosis.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK333029/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/backgrounders/imd-exclusion-and-discrimination.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/key-issues/bed-shortages>

Failure to provide prompt inpatient psychiatric hospitalization when needed causes an inhumane and expensive, fiscally irresponsible pattern of cycling people in and out of the revolving doors of emergency rooms, hospitals, homelessness, jails and causes horrific suffering. Family members of the SMI are also the collateral damage inflicted by a government who has turned a blind eye on their loved ones suffering for decades.

While the NSSC commends Senators Durbin, King, and Murphy's efforts to aid those living with SUD in getting treatment by introducing the Medicaid Coverage for Addiction Recovery Expansion Act (S.1169, H.R.2687), we are deeply concerned that this bill does not go far enough. Without incentives for providers, much needed long-term care for adults suffering with SMI, with or without a SUD, will be excluded from accessing beds.

The over 10 million suffering with SMI deserve the same opportunity to receive compassionate care which is covered by Medicare/Medicaid for all medical diseases. According to data from the Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC)<sup>11</sup>, half of those living with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder will attempt suicide at some point in their life. Many go homeless and/or wind up incarcerated. Currently, these same statistics report that in any given year, 3.9 million people with SMI are untreated. In other words, nearly half are unable to secure proper treatment in this country. That statistic is appalling and unacceptable and can only be defined as grossly negligent.

By addressing the IMD Exclusion now and eliminating it altogether, you could potentially eliminate: 50% of mass killings, 29% of family homicides, 10% of all homicides, 20% of law enforcement fatalities, and over 40,000 suicides.<sup>12</sup> You could also eliminate the cost of providing a jail for nearly 400,000<sup>13</sup> SMI from the prison population, and take many of the estimated up to 325,000<sup>14</sup> people with SMI off the streets, greatly lessening the burden of caring for our homeless population. This would be a massive forward motion for our country. Treatment works and many societal problems will fade away if treatment is sufficient.

We proudly submit our request. Please abolish the outdated, discriminatory, and counterproductive IMD Exclusion which prevents over 10 million adults living with SMI and 7.9 million adults with co-occurring disorders from receiving the care they need. We look forward to hearing from those of you who are willing to work with us.

Sincerely,

**National Shattering Silence Coalition Members:**

Amazing Grace Advocacy, North Carolina  
Justice and Serious Mental Illness, Texas  
Sooner Than Tomorrow, California

Leah Gutter, New York  
John Hallowitz, California  
Kari Hammond, Oregon

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/evidence-and-research/fast-facts>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/key-issues/violence>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/emptying-new-asylums-exec-summary.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/backgrounders/smi-and-homelessness.pdf>

Parents For Care, Maryland  
P82 Project Restoration, Arizona  
A Path of Enlightenment Healing Arts, New York  
Due Justice Project/StandUP, Pennsylvania  
Advocates For Ethical Mental Health Treatment,NH  
Healthy Mind Ministry, West Virginia  
Healing Minds NOLA, Louisiana  
Pandora's Box Productions, California  
Cure Illinois, Illinois  
Jane Anderson, Illinois  
Terry Barker, Texas  
Gwen Bartley, North Carolina  
Tama Bell, New York  
Porsche Bellamy, Connecticut  
Gloria Bertrand, Michigan  
Jeannette Bjorklund, Maryland  
Kimberly Blaker, Michigan  
Sally Bricker, Ohio  
Jim Bricker, Ohio  
Gina Burns, Alabama  
Evelyn Burton, Maryland  
Diana Cardoni, Ontario  
Mary Sheldon, California  
Michael Sheldon, California  
Tamara Dalrymple, West Virginia  
Kathy Day, California  
Fawn Dessy, California  
Carmen Dilks, California  
Katharine Dougherty, Michigan  
Wanda Duryea, Michigan  
Gretchen Egeland, Illinois  
Courtney Michel Elwell, Oregon  
Pamela Field, New Mexico  
Anne Francisco, California  
Elizabeth Garrison, California  
Deborah Geesling, Arizona  
Jeanne Gore, Maine  
Heather Grimshaw-Lee, Hawaii  
Kimberlee West, Michigan  
Nadine Whalen, Florida  
Rev. Barbara Williams Brown, New York  
Cynthia Wolfe, Massachusetts  
Amanda Woodward, Virginia  
Sheila Ganz, California  
Madeleine Ward, Illinois

Dianne Harris, Ohio  
Janet Hays, Louisiana  
Gloria Hill, Florida  
Susan Inman, Vancouver, BC  
Justtine Jackson, Illinois  
Brenda Jensen, Arizona  
Ruth Johnston, Pennsylvania  
Nancy J. Jones, Illinois  
B. Alexandra Kedrock, Virginia  
Amy Kerr, Maryland  
Kerry Martin, California  
Marilyn Martin, Maryland  
Jacqueline McKinney, Illinois  
Carole McAfee, Oregon  
Sherri McGimsey, North Carolina  
Ruth Medina, Texas  
Alison Monroe, California  
Mary Moran, New Jersey  
Mary Murphy, Oregon  
Lynn Nanos, Massachusetts  
Suzan Norton, Maine  
Teresa Pasquini, California  
Darlene Patrick, Maryland  
Robbie Payne, Georgia  
Katherine Pelaccio, New York  
Rebecca Petheram, Washington  
Laura Pogliano, Maryland  
Ron Powers, Vermont  
Robert Powitzky, Texas  
Kimberleymarie Ramsey, Oklahoma  
Dede Ranahan, California  
Mary Ann Renz, Mississippi  
Catherine Lauren Rettagliata,  
California  
Martie Rhoden Bessler, Kentucky  
Karen Riches, New York  
Frank Robbins, California  
Jasmin Salcido, California  
Ingrid Silvian, Ohio  
Jolan Smith, Pennsylvania  
Jennifer Solstice, Pennsylvania  
Angela Stott, North Carolina  
Mary Ellen Stuart, California  
Laurie Turley, Maine  
Cheri VanSant, Arizona

Taylor Brown, Virginia  
Jeffery L. Hayden, Ph.D, BCBA-D, California  
Representative Richard Malaby, Maine

Lynne Warberg, Florida  
Christi Weeks, Arizona

Contact:

Tamara Dalrymple  
Chair, NSSC Emergency Action Committee  
[TamaraDalrymple76@gmail.com](mailto:TamaraDalrymple76@gmail.com)

Jeanne Gore  
Coordinator, NSSC  
[coordinator@nationalshatteringsilencecoalition.org](mailto:coordinator@nationalshatteringsilencecoalition.org)

CC: Senator Rob Portman (R-OH),  
Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH),  
Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV),  
Senator Angus S. King Jr (I-ME),  
Senator Susan M. Collins (R-ME),  
Senator Joe Manchin III (D-WV),  
Senator Cory A. Booker (D-NJ),  
Representative Bill Foster (D-IL),  
Representative Brian K. Fitzpatrick (I-PA),  
Representative Evan H. Jenkins (R-WV),  
Representative Tim Ryan (D-OH)