



**STATEMENT  
on release of the final rule  
governing essential health benefits under the *Affordable Care Act***

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Today's release of the Essential Health Benefits (EHB) final rule<sup>1</sup> is another step in the long journey to provide insurance coverage for people living with mental and addictive disorders that is on par with coverage for other medical disorders. Beginning in 2014, all new small-group and individual-market plans will be required under the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) to cover mental health and addictive disorders and will be required to cover them at parity with medical and surgical benefits.

This EHB rule builds upon the federal parity law (the *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008*) by adding millions of insured individuals who are not now subject to the federal parity requirements (those purchasing insurance in the small group and individual market), but who will be under this final rule. It also adds coverage for millions of Americans who do not have any insurance. In total, 62.5 million Americans will benefit from federal parity protections as a result of the ACA, according to research from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>2</sup>

For far too long we have had a two-tiered insurance system with those who had brain disorders getting less coverage than those who had heart disease. Finally, this practice is coming to an end. Behavioral health care is essential to overall health, and this final rule clearly states that mental and addictive disorders should be treated the same as all other disorders.

This is a game-changer for people living with mental and addictive disorders; but unless these provisions are implemented carefully and with appropriate oversight, these gains will not be fully achieved.

We welcome the growing awareness that mental and addictive disorders should be covered no differently than other medical conditions. Now we need to continue to work together to reduce the stigma of these illnesses so more people who are in need of treatment will, in fact, seek the help they need.

We look forward to working with the Administration, Congress, and all stakeholders to make the promises of coverage and access a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) at [http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2013-04084\\_PI.pdf](http://www.ofr.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2013-04084_PI.pdf). To be published in the 2.25.13 *Federal Register*.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Beronio K, Po R, Skopec L. "ASPE Research Brief: Affordable Care Act will expand mental health and substance use disorder benefits and parity protections for 62 million Americans." 2.20.13. See <http://aspe.hhs.gov>.