



February 12, 2013

The Honorable Mark Begich
United States Senate
111 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Barber
United States House of Representatives
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Begich and Congressman Barber:

The National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems (NAPHS) is writing today to thank you for your leadership in authoring the *Mental Health First Aid Act of 2013* (S.153 / H.R. 274). This bill will help raise awareness and increase public education on mental illness and addiction disorders.

Congress approved landmark legislation to put coverage for mental health and addictive disorders on par with other medical disorders (the *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008* and *Affordable Care Act*). We have long recognized the stigma associated with behavioral health disorders. Each year, more than 1 in 5 Americans experiences a mental health or substance use disorder, according to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Yet, U.S. society remains largely uneducated about the signs and symptoms of mental illness.

Far too often, this lack of knowledge – along with the stigma attached to seeking help – prevents people who need treatment from accessing the care they need in a timely fashion. While many Americans know how to administer first aid and seek medical help should they come across a person having a heart attack, few are trained to provide similar help to someone experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

The *Mental Health First Aid Act* authorizes \$20 million in grants to fund Mental Health First Aid training programs around the country. Participants would be trained in recognizing the symptoms of common mental illnesses and addiction disorders; de-escalating crisis situations safely; and initiating timely referral to mental health and substance abuse resources available in the community. This legislation will provide critical public education that ultimately will help decrease stigma and increase access to care. Along with other important public education programs, such as Crisis Intervention Team programs for first responders (CIT), Mental Health First Aid is a crucial tool in helping Americans identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Covall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Covall
President/ CEO