



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA
Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.

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New Bill Advances Equal Treatment for Mental Health and Physical Health

SPAN USA Praises Sponsors Senators Domenici, Kennedy

Washington, D.C. (February 12, 2007) – U.S. Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA) today introduced a bill that will allow more people in need of mental health and addiction recovery services to obtain equitable insurance coverage for their conditions, according to the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA).

“Without mental health, we really don’t have health,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA, the nation’s leading grassroots advocacy organization working to advance public policies that prevent suicide. “Long a top priority of SPAN USA, this is a significant step forward to help end insurance discrimination against people with mental and substance use disorders. SPAN USA applauds Senators Domenici and Kennedy for their unwavering efforts to advance equal treatment of physical health and mental health for all Americans.”

Some of the most notable provisions in the “Mental Health Parity Act of 2007” include:

- Parity for day and visit limits, co-payments, deductibles and other ways in which health plans have discriminated against mental health;
- Parity for in-network and out-of-network services, when those services are offered; and
- Parity for substance abuse treatment.

Research has shown that 90 percent of suicides are associated with a treatable mental illness or substance abuse conditions, yet two-thirds of those who die by suicide are not receiving treatment at the time of their death. More than 31,000 Americans die by suicide each year, more than die by homicide or HIV/AIDS.

“We are hopeful that this legislation will allow more individuals access to the mental health and substance abuse care that they need,” Reed said. “With greater access to mental health care, we believe the number of suicides can be reduced from the current rate of one suicide every sixteen minutes. The 113 million Americans who have health care coverage sponsored by larger employers have much to gain from having mental health parity.”

While almost all (89%) Americans agree mental health is as important as physical health, only one-fourth (24%) believe physical and mental health are treated with equal importance in the U.S. health care system, according to a national poll by Research!America and SPAN USA. “This legislation will take us one step closer to changing that once and for all,” said Reed.

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SPAN USA is the nation’s only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding in 1996, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.