

*Monday, September 23, 2013
Denver, Colorado*

Last week, behavioral health advocates from all over Colorado traveled to Washington D.C. to attend the National Council's Hill Day to meet with their Senators and Representatives to discuss legislation that, if enacted, would improve the lives of people living with mental illnesses and addictions. In a loud and unified voice, over 70 Coloradans made three major requests of their federal elected officials:

1. **Sponsor the bipartisan Excellence in Mental Health Act** (S. 264/H.R. 1263). The Excellence Act would help community behavioral health organizations meet the increased demand for robust services by enhancing their Medicaid funding if they meet an advanced standard of care that ensures they offer a high quality, comprehensive range of evidence-based interventions to the individuals they serve. If enacted, the Excellence Act would help as many as 750,000 uninsured and low-income Americans with the most serious and persistent mental health conditions.
2. **Cosponsor the Mental Health First Aid Act** (S. 153/H.R. 274). This legislation authorizes \$20 million in grants to fund Mental Health First Aid training programs around the country to ensure Americans can recognize common symptoms of mental illnesses and addictions, de-escalating crisis situations safely, and initiating timely referrals to community mental health and addiction treatment resources.
3. **Sponsor the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act** (S. 1517/H.R. 2957). This legislation would make federal incentive payments for the meaningful use of electronic health records under Medicare and Medicaid available to mental health and addiction treatment facilities and behavioral health professionals. The Behavioral Health IT Act will support care coordination among all corners of the healthcare system and strengthen providers' ability to deliver integrated care for people with the most serious mental illnesses and addictions.



The National Council for Behavioral Health, together with five other behavioral health groups — NAMI, Mental Health America, the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, and the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance — welcomed a record-breaking number of advocates to the nation's capital.

Coloradans contributed to this record attendance by repeating as the largest state delegation. George DelGrosso, CEO, Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council, was honored to accept the "Spirit Award" on behalf our Colorado Hill Day attendees. Here at CBHC, we're always amazed at the number of people that register for and attend Hill Day, but it's really the quality of the advocacy work that makes us so proud.

Several people shared deeply personal stories about their experience in the behavioral health system and how the legislation would benefit individuals if enacted. Great teamwork was observed as others supported those stories by making specific asks to sponsor each piece of legislation. In cases where legislators already sponsor legislation, attendees expressed their thanks and encouraged continued support.

For those that committed their time and resources to travel to Washington, your effort does have an impact. **The National Council reported that, as of last Thursday, the Excellence Act has gained four new cosponsors and the Behavioral Health IT Act has welcomed six new cosponsors.**

On behalf of the team here at CBHC, thank you!

The work doesn't end with Hill Day. If you were unable to travel to Washington, you can still join the conversation:

- Check out [Susan Dentzer's keynote speech](#).
- Join the conversation on [Twitter](#) and follow [@NationalCouncil](#)
- Write, call, or meet with your legislators to discuss the [Excellence Act](#) and the [Mental Health First Aid Act](#), and the [Behavioral Health IT Act](#).

If you did attend Hill Day, be sure to follow-up with your Representative and their healthcare legislative aide to thank them for their time and to invite them to your organization when they are home and visiting their Congressional districts.



All of this advocacy work occurred in the midst of unprecedented and tragic flooding that impacted much of our state. As we have had to do too often in recent times, Coloradans rallied to respond to yet another crisis. Colorado can be proud of the stories our delegates shared with our federal elected officials about the heroic efforts that CBHC member organizations have taken to support each other and the individuals they serve.

Our thoughts and best wishes go out to those still dealing with the devastating consequences of the recent floods.

Best Regards,

Frank Cornelia
Hill Day 2013 - Colorado State Captain

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Working together to improve the health of Coloradans through the delivery of high quality, community-based, integrated behavioral and physical healthcare services.