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ABHW Statement on the Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee Report

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 14, 2017) – The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW), the national voice for payers that manage behavioral health insurance benefits for over 175 million people, today responded to the report, *The Way Forward: Federal Action for a System That Works for All People Living with SMI and SED and Their Families and Caregivers*, released by the Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee (ISMICC).

In December 2016, the 21st Century Cures Act established ISMICC to enhance coordination across federal agencies in an effort to improve treatment, access, and delivery of care for people with severe mental illness (SMI) and severe emotional disturbances (SED) and their families. The Committee today released its 2017 ISMICC report to Congress which offers an initial assessment of the current needs of Americans with SMI and SED and recommendations for moving forward.

The report identified five major areas of focus.

1. Strengthen Federal Coordination to Improve Care.
2. Access and Engagement: Make It Easier to Get Good Care.
3. Treatment and Recovery: Close the Gap Between What Works and What Is Offered.
4. Increase Opportunities for Diversion and Improve Care for People with SMI and SED Involved in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems.
5. Develop Finance Strategies to Increase Availability and Affordability of Care.

Pamela Greenberg, President and CEO, Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness stated, “ABHW and its members are encouraged by the Committee’s report and their efforts to address the consequences of inadequate access to mental health care in the United States. We fully hope that appropriate resources will be allocated to move the needle in providing behavioral health services for the nearly 10 million Americans in need.”

ABHW lauds the dedication and hard work of the Committee and offers the following recommendations to assist with implementation:

- Better alignment and increased education about the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) to state officials who are enforcing mental health parity laws and its accompanying regulations. Consistent interpretation and enforcement is necessary to provide regulatory certainty.
- Expanded access and elimination of barriers to telehealth services would increase treatment options and access to individuals with SMI and SED, as well as, address behavioral health workforce shortages.
- Waiver approval for states to eliminate barriers to treatment resulting from the federal Institutes for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion within the Medicaid program – the exclusion limits beneficiary access to needed and appropriate care.

ABHW also supports the Committee’s assessment regarding the necessity of removing the stigma associated with mental illness. Through our [Stamp Out Stigma](#) campaign, ABHW will continue to address stigma surrounding SMI and SED and break down the barriers associated with the disease and seeking treatment.

Our member companies are at the forefront of addressing these issues and will continue to work with Congress, consumers, public health officials, the Administration, and local and community providers until all of those that suffer from a mental illness have access to quality, evidence-based treatment and the care that they deserve.

ABHW Public Comments: [Strategies for Improving Parity for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Coverage](#)

ISMICC Final Report: [The Way Forward: Federal Action for a System That Works for All People Living with SMI and SED and Their Families and Caregivers](#)

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ABHW is an association of the nation’s leading behavioral health and wellness companies. These companies provide an array of services related to mental health, substance use disorders, employee assistance, disease management, and other health and wellness programs to over 175 million people in both the public and private sectors. ABHW and its member companies use their behavioral health expertise to improve health care outcomes for individuals and families across the health care spectrum. Member companies - Aetna Behavioral Health, Anthem, Beacon Health Options, Centene Corporation, Cigna, Humana Behavioral Health, New Directions Behavioral Health, Optum, and PerformCare.