



December 11, 2013

Senator Rob Portman
488 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Health IT Now Coalition Supports Behavioral HIT Act

Dear Senator Portman:

The Health IT Now Coalition – a diverse group of more than 60 organizations representing patients, health providers, health insurers, agents, brokers, and employers -- is writing to express our strong support for the Behavioral Health Information Technology Coordination Amendment that you will be offering to the SGR Repeal and Medicare Beneficiaries Access Improvement Act of 2013.

Congressional approval of the HITECH law fostered standards adoption for information exchange and quality improvement while creating financial incentives for the adoption, use, maintenance and training for health IT. The process of health IT diffusion is hindered when clinicians treating patients with medical/surgical diseases are equipped with new technologies, while, at the very same time, providers serving people with often life-threatening mental illnesses operate with antiquated paper medical records.

Your Amendment corrects this inequity by including psychiatric hospitals, Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs), clinical psychologists and outpatient and inpatient addiction providers in HITECH's incentive programs. Further, we believe that the success of many federal and state initiatives whose core goals include improved care coordination for vulnerable patient populations, better outcomes and lower costs depend on all members of a care team, including mental health providers, having access to an entire patient history at the time of care. These care coordination models can only be done well with Electronic Medical Records. It thus makes little sense to exclude entire categories of health care providers from the HITECH law.

Health IT Now looks forward to working with you to ensure your amendment is signed into law. Many thanks for your outstanding leadership.

Sincerely,

Joel C. White
Executive Director