



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

June --, 2013

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Collins and Mikulski:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to applaud your ongoing commitment to the mental and behavioral health needs of older Americans and to express our strong support for the *Positive Aging Act of 2013*. This important legislation will improve access to vital mental and behavioral health care for older adults by supporting the integration of mental health services in primary care and community settings.

Approximately 20% of adults aged 65 and older have had at least one mental health disorder, including dementia, in the past year. These disorders can have a significant impact on both physical and mental health, often leading to increases in disease, disability, and mortality. For instance, data indicate that for the past 60 years, white men age 85 and older have the highest rates of suicide in our country and that depression is the foremost risk factor. Tragically, many of these suicides may have been prevented, as approximately 60 percent of older adults who die by suicide visited a primary care physician within 30 days of their death. Although effective treatments exist, the mental health needs of many older Americans go unrecognized and untreated because of poorly integrated systems of care. The 2012 Institute of Medicine report, entitled *The Mental Health and Substance Use Workforce for Older Adults: In Whose Hands* details the high prevalence of mental health and substance use conditions and highlights the essential role of patient-centered, coordinated care in adequately addressing these issues in older adults.

The *Positive Aging Act* takes an important step toward improving access to quality mental and behavioral health care for older adults by integrating mental health services in primary care and community settings where older adults reside and receive services. By supporting collaboration between interdisciplinary teams of mental health professionals and other providers of health and social services, this legislation promotes an integrated approach to addressing the health and well being of our nation's growing and increasingly diverse older adult population. We commend you for your leadership and commitment to the mental and behavioral health needs of older adults and look forward to working with you to ensure prompt passage of the *Positive Aging Act of 2013*.

Sincerely,