

Behavioral Health IT Coalition Asks the ONC to Include Meaningful Use Incentive Payments To Achieve Strategic Plan Goals

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

OFFICE OF NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY'S (ONC) STRATEGIC PLAN DOES NOT INCLUDE PROPER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FUNDING

WASHINGTON, DC- FEBRUARY 6, 2015 – The Behavioral Health Information Technology Coalition, in coordination with the Mental Health Liaison Group, expresses their disappointment with the ONC for not including proper behavioral health funding in its proposed strategic plan, “Federal Health IT Strategic Plan 2015-2020.”

The proposed Strategic Plan includes goals such as increased adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) by behavioral health providers and in behavioral health settings, and making quick and safe care decisions for patients. The ONC set these goals under the inaccurate assumption that behavioral health providers have the resources to fund the listed achievements.

Most behavioral health providers and settings do not have the financial resources to purchase and implement EHRs without Medicaid and Medicare meaningful use incentive payments. The National Council for Behavioral Health found in 2012 that, “The most significant barrier for the behavioral health sector was cost – upfront financial costs and the costs of ongoing maintenance.” Consequently, behavioral health providers and settings cannot provide quality, coordinated care decisions without the efficiency of EHRs.

In a recent study, the Arthur Webb Group found, “Two-thirds of adult discharges with major behavioral health conditions had at least two other forms of chronic diseases.” This finding underscores the importance of coordinating care for behavioral health patients with chronic diseases. EHRs would greatly improve the care of such patients suffering from severe mental illness of whom die an average of 25 years earlier than other American adults, according to a study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There are currently 8 million people subject to the care of the public mental health system. The BHIT Coalition requests the discretionary funding to assist in the success of the proposed Strategic Plan to aid the millions impacted. The plan will not be successful without the federal resources to support the purchase and implementation of EHRs for behavioral health providers and settings.

The Behavioral Health Information Technology Coalition is the unifying voice of America's mental health and information technology providers. The Coalition is

comprised of organizations and companies including the American Psychological Association (APA), Centerstone, National Association of Counties, National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors, Jewish Federations of North America, National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems, National Association of Social Workers, National Council for Behavioral Health, Netsmart, National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, and Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness. Visit www.bhitcoalition.org for more information.

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