

## LINKING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR DUALS

By DAVID PITTMAN

06/21/16 05:58 AM EDT

Approximately 9 million seniors are dually eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, a group that consumes more in health services than the average senior. Roughly a third of these “dual eligibles” have a serious mental illness. So how it is possible to coordinate their behavioral health needs with their physical health care, since the former are living in a paper world -- having been left out of the HITECH Act?

— There are a few ways, Michelle Herman Soper of the [Center for Health Care Strategies](#) said at a Bipartisan Policy Center [event](#) Monday. More state Medicaid programs are using managed care contracts to stipulate integration of behavioral health needs. States without a heavy presence of managed care are using quality measures tied to incentives to force behavioral and physical providers to work together.

— But more needs to be done, says behavioral health IT lobbyist Al Guida. “Neither the Medicaid/Medicare Dual Eligible Demos, nor the current Medicare ACO program, can function properly without integrating mental health and addiction providers,” Guida told Morning eHealth. “To do that, you need behavioral health IT incentives.” Of course, Congress has punted for years on adding behavioral health providers to the meaningful use program, and it’s looking very doubtful it’ll do it this year.