

From: POLITICO Pro eHealth Whiteboard [<mailto:politicoemail@politicopro.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, December 09, 2014 11:27 AM
To: Al Guida
Subject: Behavioral health group seeks change in CMS rule

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A group representing those who treat the mentally ill and substance abusers today asked CMS to change the definition of behavioral health in a recent rule so that therapists can get access to meaningful use and other incentive programs to improve care for their patients.

The Behavioral Health Information Technology Coalition recently began a push in support of bills introduced in Congress in 2013 that would extend meaningful use to behavior health. The 8 million Americans with serious mental illness are much more likely than others to suffer chronic physical illnesses as well. Health IT helps therapists keep better track of their patients and assure continuity of care.

[The letter](#) to CMS director Marilyn Tavenner concerns a recently proposed CMS rule that among other things sets conditions for participation in programs that support health information exchange. Behavioral health settings are classified as post-acute and long-term care in the rule, but they actually provide acute care, the letter states.

People with mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar in the United States have average life expectancies similar to those of Sub-Saharan Africa, the letter states.

“We ask that your agency use discretionary funds to expand HIE funding for behavioral health settings to address the high risk population identified above,” it states. “At a minimum, the ONC should end the practice of characterizing psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, psychologists, and addiction treatment facilities as solely “post-acute care” providers.”

— *Arthur Allen*

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