

Medsphere Voices Support for Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2015

House legislation seeks to close gaps for families facing mental health challenges, extends federal support for health IT adoption to mental health providers

Carlsbad, CA—Between 2009 and 2012, state mental health systems [cut \\$5 billion](#) in mental health services and eliminated roughly 4,500 inpatient beds. Medsphere believes, and empirical evidence demonstrates, that these kinds of cuts can't help but ripple outward into American society, impacting family stability, homelessness and overall medical costs as use of the emergency department rises for non-emergency treatment.

A child psychologist by profession, Rep. Tim Murphy (R-PA) has made care for the mentally ill the hallmark of his political career and continued that charge last week with the introduction of [H.R. 2646](#), the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2015. Medsphere supports Rep. Murphy's most recent efforts to build a more comprehensive mental health support network for individual families and the broader American family.

Among the significant components of the Helping Families act is a provision that would amend earlier legislation (the Public Health Service Act of 1944) to expand provider definitions, extending federal financial support for adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) to mental and behavioral health providers. Medsphere has previously and [consistently championed](#) the extension of EHR incentives to mental health because it is our business, naturally, and because it is essential to the creation of truly accountable care.

Significantly, Rep. Murphy's bill would also reform aspects of Medicare and Medicaid to fill in the gaps created by reductions in state budgets. The legislation is pushing to create greater access to prescription medications, eliminate the 190-day lifetime limit on inpatient psychiatric hospital stays, and recognize caregivers as personal patient representatives in terms of HIPAA privacy regulations.

“With the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, Rep. Murphy is shining a light on both the mental healthcare crisis we face in this country and the disparity in care associated with it,” said Medsphere President and CEO Irv Lichtenwald. “Our inability to treat mental health as a component of overall care is driving up costs through ED visits, bankrupting families that can't afford to shoulder all the costs of treatment themselves, and dramatically expanding the ranks of the homeless. Medsphere is proud to support Rep. Murphy in this legislation and looks forward to a future of comprehensive and accountable patient care.”

Murphy's bill represents the most recent effort to both expand federal financial support for EHR adoption and broaden the mental healthcare support network. Most recently, Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), introduced the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act of 2013 (S.1517). This bill sought to amend the Public Health Service and

Social Security acts to define behavioral and mental health professionals as healthcare providers, making behavioral health hospitals eligible for Meaningful Use financial incentives.

Despite the current exclusion of mental health facilities from Meaningful Use incentives, Medsphere has implemented the company's OpenVista EHR in several behavioral health hospitals, including nationally recognized Silver Hill Hospital in New Canaan, Connecticut, among others.

As the leading provider of open-source healthcare IT solutions, Medsphere developed OpenVista from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' VistA solution, widely credited with helping transform the VA into the nation's most efficient and clinically effective healthcare organization.