THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

NOW IS THE TIME

The President's plan to protect our children and our communities by reducing gun violence



WH.GOV/NOW-IS-THE-TIME

JANUARY
SIXTEENTH
TWO THOUSAND AND THIRTEEN

AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Our nation has suffered too much at the hands of dangerous people who use guns to commit horrific acts of violence. As President Obama said following the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, ***"We won't be able to stop every violent act, but if there is even one thing that we can do to prevent any of these events, we have a deep obligation, all of us, to try."***

Most gun owners are responsible and law-abiding, and they use their guns safely. The President strongly believes that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms. But to better protect our children and our communities from tragic mass shootings like those in Newtown, Aurora, Oak Creek, and Tucson, there are four common-sense steps we can take right now.

THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN INCLUDES:

1. Closing background check loopholes to keep guns out of dangerous hands;
2. Banning military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and taking other common-sense steps to reduce gun violence;
3. Making schools safer; and
4. Increasing access to mental health services.

While no law or set of laws will end gun violence, it is clear that the American people want action. If even one child's life can be saved, then we need to act. Now is the time to do the right thing for our children, our communities, and the country we love.

1. CLOSING BACKGROUND CHECK LOOPHOLES TO KEEP GUNS OUT OF DANGEROUS HANDS

Most gun owners buy their guns legally and use them safely, whether for self-defense, hunting, or sport shooting. Yet too often, irresponsible and dangerous individuals have been able to easily get their hands on firearms. We must strengthen our efforts to keep guns from falling into the wrong hands.

REQUIRE BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR ALL GUN SALES

The single most important thing we can do to prevent gun violence and mass shootings, like the one in Newtown, is to make sure those who would commit acts of violence cannot get access to guns. A critical tool in achieving that goal is the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which was created by the Brady Act to ensure that guns are not sold to those prohibited from buying them, including felons and those convicted of domestic violence. Over the last 14 years it has helped keep more than 1.5 million guns out of the wrong hands. It is able to make 92 percent of background check determinations on the spot. However, too many guns are still sold without a background check and too many individuals prohibited from having a gun slip through the cracks. We need to strengthen the system by requiring every gun buyer to go through a background check and ensuring that the background check system has complete information on people prohibited from having guns.
We should:

- **Require criminal background checks for all gun sales:** Right now, federally licensed firearms dealers are required to run background checks on those buying guns, but studies estimate that nearly 40 percent of all gun sales are made by private sellers who are exempt from this requirement. A national survey of inmates found that only 12 percent of those who used a gun in a crime acquired it from a retail store or pawn shop, where a background check should have been run. Congress should pass legislation that goes beyond just closing the "gun show loophole" to require background checks for all firearm sales, with limited, common-sense exceptions for cases like certain transfers between family members and temporary transfers for hunting and sporting purposes.

- **Call on licensed dealers and private sellers to do their part through executive action:** Private sellers can already choose to sell their guns through licensed dealers so the dealer can run a background check on the buyer, and the Administration is calling on them to do so. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) will send an open letter to licensed dealers giving them guidance on how best to facilitate these checks.

STRENGTHEN THE BACKGROUND CHECK SYSTEM

The background check system is the most efficient and effective way to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals, but we need to make sure it has access to complete information about these individuals. For example, although the number of mental health records available to the system has increased by 800 percent since 2004, a recent report by the Government Accountability Office found that there are still 17 states that have made fewer than 10 mental health records available. We need to make sure reliable data on prohibited purchasers is available to the background check system. The Administration is announcing four new executive actions to enhance the system's ability to identify dangerous people and stop them from getting guns:

- **Address unnecessary legal barriers that prevent states from reporting information about those prohibited from having guns:** Some states have cited concerns about restrictions under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act as a reason not to share relevant information on people prohibited from gun ownership for mental health reasons. The Administration will begin the regulatory process to remove any needless barriers, starting by gathering information about the scope and extent of the problem.

- **Improve incentives for states to share information with the background check system:** States are a critical source for several key categories of relevant records and data, including criminal history records and records of persons prohibited from having guns for mental health reasons. The Department of Justice will invest $20 million in FY2013 to give states stronger incentives to make this data available. The Administration is also proposing $50 million for this purpose in FY2014, and will look for additional ways to ensure that states are doing their part to provide relevant information.

- **Hold federal agencies accountable for sharing reliable information with the background check system:** Some federal agencies also have relevant records. The President is issuing a Presidential Memorandum holding agencies to requirements that they identify these records, make them available to the background check system, and regularly report that those records are complete and up-to-date.

- **Make sure dangerous people are prohibited from having guns:** The background check system is designed to keep guns out of the hands of those forbidden by law to have them. But we need to make sure our laws are effective at identifying the dangerous or untrustworthy individuals that should not have access to guns. The President will direct the Attorney General, in consultation with other relevant agencies, to review the laws governing who is prohibited from

having guns and make legislative and executive recommendations to ensure dangerous people aren't slipping through the cracks.

2: BANNING MILITARY-STYLE ASSAULT WEAPONS AND HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES, AND TAKING OTHER COMMON-SENSE STEPS TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

We need to do more to prevent easy access to instruments of mass violence. We also need to provide law enforcement with additional tools to prevent gun violence, end the freeze on gun violence research, make sure health care providers know they can report credible threats of violence and talk to their patients about gun safety, and promote responsible gun ownership.

GET MILITARY-STYLE ASSAULT WEAPONS AND HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES OFF THE STREETS

A 2010 survey by the Police Executive Research Forum found that more than one-third of police departments reported an increase in criminals' use of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines since the prohibition on high-capacity magazines and assault weapons expired in 2004. To protect law enforcement and enhance public safety, we must redouble our efforts to:

- **Reinstate and strengthen the ban on assault weapons:** The shooters in Aurora and Newtown used the type of semiautomatic rifles that were the target of the assault weapons ban that was in place from 1994 to 2004. That ban was an important step, but manufacturers were able to circumvent the prohibition with cosmetic modifications to their weapons. Congress must reinstate and strengthen the prohibition on assault weapons.

- **Limit ammunition magazines to 10 rounds:** The case for prohibiting high-capacity magazines has been proven over and over; the shooters at Virginia Tech, Tucson, Aurora, Oak Creek, and Newtown all used magazines holding more than 10 rounds, which would have been prohibited under the 1994 law. These magazines enable any semiautomatic weapon to be used as an instrument of mass violence, yet they are once again legal and now come standard with many handguns and rifles. Congress needs to reinstate the prohibition on magazines holding more than 10 rounds.

- **Finish the job of getting armor-piercing bullets off the streets:** It is already illegal to manufacture and import armor-piercing ammunition except for military or law enforcement use.

But it is generally still not illegal to possess or transfer this dangerous ammunition. Congress should finish the job of protecting law enforcement and the public by banning the possession of armor-piercing ammunition by, and its transfer to, anyone other than the military and law enforcement.

GIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO PREVENT AND PROSECUTE GUN CRIME

In order to prevent and respond to gun violence, we must give law enforcement every tool they need to keep us safe. That includes passing stronger laws to stop those who would put guns into the hands of criminals, keeping 15,000 cops on the street, and eliminating restrictions that keep federal law enforcement from doing its job.

- **Create serious punishments for gun trafficking:** Today, criminals can easily buy guns from unlicensed dealers, or acquire them with the help of so-called "straw purchasers" who pass the required background check to buy guns from licensed dealers. But there is no explicit law against straw purchasing, so straw purchasers and others who traffic guns can often only be prosecuted for paperwork violations. We cannot allow those who help put guns into the hands of criminals to get away with just a slap on the wrist. Congress should close these loopholes with new gun trafficking laws that impose serious penalties for these crimes.

- **Help communities across the country keep 15,000 cops on the street:** One of the most important steps we can take to reduce gun violence is to keep police officers at their posts in our neighborhoods and communities. The President is calling on Congress to act on the Administration's $4 billion proposal to help keep 15,000 cops on the street in cities and towns across the country.

- **Take executive action to enhance tracing data:** When law enforcement recovers a gun during a criminal investigation, they can trace that gun's path from its manufacturer, to the dealer who sold it, to its first purchaser. This gun tracing process helps law enforcement solve violent crimes by generating leads in specific cases and can reveal gun trafficking patterns when large amounts of tracing data are combined. However, not all federal law enforcement agencies are uniformly required to trace all guns they recover and keep in custody. The President will issue a Presidential Memorandum requiring them to trace all such firearms.

- **Take executive action to help law enforcement avoid returning guns to the wrong hands:** Law enforcement should never be put in the position of unknowingly returning a gun to an individual who is prohibited from having it. Currently, when law enforcement must

return firearms seized as part of an investigation, they do not have the ability to conduct a full background check on the owner. The Administration will propose regulations to ensure that law enforcement has access to the database needed for complete background checks.

- **Finally give the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) a confirmed director:** The ATF has not had a confirmed director for six years. There is no excuse for leaving the key agency enforcing gun laws in America without a leader. It is time for Congress to confirm an ATF director.

- **Eliminate restrictions that force the ATF to authorize importation of dangerous weapons simply because of their age:** ATF is required to authorize the importation of certain "curio or relic" firearms, and outdated regulations include all firearms manufactured more than 50 years ago in the definition of "curio or relic." But today, firearms manufactured more than 50 years ago include large numbers of semiautomatic military-surplus rifles, some of which are easily convertible into machine guns or otherwise appealing for use in crime. Congress should get rid of restrictions that prevent ATF from changing this definition, enabling ATF to ensure that firearms imported as curios or relics are actually of interest as collectibles, rather than letting these rules be used as a way to acquire fully functional and powerful military weapons.

- **Maximize enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence and prosecute gun crime:** The Attorney General will work with all United States Attorneys to continue to ensure that every appropriate resource is focused on preventing gun violence. To this end, the Attorney General will ask all U.S. Attorneys to consider whether supplemental efforts would be appropriate in their districts, in areas such as prosecutions of people who have been convicted of a felony and illegally seek to obtain a firearm, or people who attempt to evade the background check system by providing false information.

- **Analyze information on lost and stolen guns and make it widely available to law enforcement:** The Department of Justice will publish an annual report on lost and stolen guns to ensure that data collected by ATF is available. This report will include state-by-state statistics about guns reported as missing. Making this data available will provide valuable information to law enforcement about how to target its resources, and give states and cities the information they need to pass laws and take other effective steps to make sure that lost and stolen guns are reported. The Department will also identify best practices that are working today and encourage states and cities to follow those models.

- **Provide effective training for active shooter situations for 14,000 law enforcement officers, first responders, and school officials:** One of the best ways to minimize the loss of life in a mass shooting is to make sure law enforcement, first responders, school officials, and others are prepared to respond to an active shooter. The Administration will immediately expand access to federal training, and federal agencies will ensure that protocols for responding to active shooter situations are consistent. And Congress should provide an additional $14 million to help train 14,000 more police officers and other public and private personnel to respond to active shooter situations.

END THE FREEZE ON GUN VIOLENCE RESEARCH

There are approximately 30,000 firearm-related homicides and suicides a year, a number large enough to make clear this is a public health crisis. But for years, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other scientific agencies have been barred by Congress from using funds to "advocate or promote gun control," and some members of Congress have claimed this prohibition also bans the CDC from conducting any research on the causes of gun violence. However, research on gun violence is not advocacy; it is critical public health research that gives all Americans information they need.

- **Conduct research on the causes and prevention of gun violence, including links between video games, media images, and violence:** The President is issuing a Presidential Memorandum directing the Centers for Disease Control and scientific agencies to conduct research into the causes and prevention of gun violence. It is based on legal analysis that concludes such research is not prohibited by any appropriations language. The CDC will start immediately by assessing existing strategies for preventing gun violence and identifying the most pressing research questions, with the greatest potential public health impact. And the Administration is calling on Congress to provide $10 million for the CDC to conduct further research, including investigating the relationship between video games, media images, and violence.

- **Better understand how and when firearms are used in violent death:** To research gun violence prevention, we also need better data. When firearms are used in homicides or suicides, the National Violent Death Reporting System collects anonymous data, including the type of firearm used, whether the firearm was stored loaded or locked, and details on youth gun access. Congress should invest an additional $20 million to expand this system from the 18 states

currently participating to all 50 states, helping Americans better understand how and when firearms are used in a violent death and informing future research and prevention strategies.

PRESERVE THE RIGHTS OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TO PROTECT THEIR PATIENTS AND COMMUNITIES FROM GUN VIOLENCE

We should never ask doctors and other health care providers to turn a blind eye to the risks posed by guns in the wrong hands.

- **Clarify that no federal law prevents health care providers from warning law enforcement authorities about threats of violence:** Doctors and other mental health professionals play an important role in protecting the safety of their patients and the broader community by reporting direct and credible threats of violence to the authorities. But there is public confusion about whether federal law prohibits such reports about threats of violence. The Department of Health and Human Services is issuing a letter to health care providers clarifying that no federal law prohibits these reports in any way.

- **Protect the rights of health care providers to talk to their patients about gun safety:** Doctors and other health care providers also need to be able to ask about firearms in their patients' homes and safe storage of those firearms, especially if their patients show signs of certain mental illnesses or if they have a young child or mentally ill family member at home. Some have incorrectly claimed that language in the Affordable Care Act prohibits doctors from asking their patients about guns and gun safety. Medical groups also continue to fight against state laws attempting to ban doctors from asking these questions. The Administration will issue guidance clarifying that the Affordable Care Act does not prohibit or otherwise regulate communication between doctors and patients, including about firearms.

ENCOURAGE GUN OWNERS TO LIVE UP TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO STORE GUNS SAFELY

The President believes that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms, and he respects our nation's rich hunting and sport shooting traditions and the millions of responsible Americans who participate in them every year. But this right comes with a responsibility to safely store guns to prevent them from accidentally or intentionally being used to harm others. The Administration is encouraging gun owners to take responsibility for keeping their guns safe and encouraging the development of technology that will make it easier for gun owners to meet this

responsibility, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission is assessing the need for new standards for gun locks.

- **Launch a national responsible gun ownership campaign:** The Administration will encourage gun owners to take responsibility for keeping their guns safe with a national campaign. The campaign will promote common-sense gun safety measures like the use of gun safes and trigger locks, separate storage of guns and ammunition, and the reporting of lost and stolen weapons to law enforcement.

- **Review and enhance as warranted safety standards for gun locks and gun safes:** We also need to make sure that gun locks and gun safes work as intended. Several gun locks have been subject to recall due to their failure to function properly; that is not acceptable. The Chair of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) intends to review the effectiveness of gun locks and gun safes, including existing voluntary industry standards, and take any steps that may be warranted to improve the standards as well as to protect the public from unreasonable risks of injury or death that arise when those products within the CPSC's jurisdiction fail.

- **Encourage the development of innovative gun safety technology:** Despite rapid advances in technologies in recent years, there are few readily available firearms that utilize these new technologies to help guard against unauthorized access and use. The President is directing the Attorney General to work with technology experts to review existing and emerging gun safety technologies, and to issue a report on the availability and use of those technologies. In addition, the Administration will issue a challenge to the private sector to develop innovative and cost-effective gun safety technology and provide prizes for those technologies that are proven to be reliable and effective.

3: MAKING SCHOOLS SAFER

We need to make our schools safer, not only by enhancing their physical security and making sure they are prepared to respond to emergencies like a mass shooting, but also by creating safer and more nurturing school climates that help prevent school violence. Each school is different and should have the flexibility to address its most pressing needs. Some schools will want trained and armed police; others may prefer increased counseling services. Either way, each district should be able to choose what is best to protect its own students.

PUT UP TO 1,000 MORE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AND COUNSELORS IN SCHOOLS AND HELP SCHOOLS INVEST IN SAFETY

Putting school resource officers and mental health professionals in schools can help prevent school crime and student-on-student violence. School resource officers are specially trained police officers that work in schools. When equipped with proper training and supported by evidence-based school discipline policies, they can deter crime with their presence and advance community policing objectives. Their roles as teachers and counselors enable them to develop trusting relationships with students that can result in threats being detected and crises averted before they occur. School psychologists, social workers, and counselors can help create a safe and nurturing school climate by providing mental health services to students who need help. Not every school will want police officers or additional school counselors, but we should do what we can to help schools get the staff they determine they need to stay safe.

- **Take executive action to provide incentives for schools to hire school resource officers:** COPS Hiring Grants, which help police departments hire officers, can already be used by departments to fund school resource officers. This year, the Department of Justice will provide an incentive for police departments to hire these officers by providing a preference for grant applications that support school resource officers.

- **Put up to 1,000 new school resource officers and school counselors on the job:** The Administration is proposing a new Comprehensive School Safety program, which will help school districts hire staff and make other critical investments in school safety. The program will give $150 million to school districts and law enforcement agencies to hire school resource officers, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors. The Department of Justice will also develop a model for using school resource officers, including best practices on age-appropriate methods for working with students.

- **Invest in other strategies to make our schools safer:** School districts could also use these Comprehensive School Safety Grants to purchase school safety equipment; develop and update public safety plans; conduct threat assessments; and train "crisis intervention teams" of law enforcement officers to work with the mental health community to respond to and assist students in crisis. And the General Services Administration will use its purchasing power to help schools buy safety equipment affordably.

ENSURE EVERY SCHOOL HAS A COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

In the unthinkable event of another school shooting, it is essential that schools have in place effective and reliable plans to respond. A 2010 survey found that while 84 percent of public schools had a written response plan in the event of a shooting, only 52 percent had drilled their students on the plan in the past year. We must ensure that every school has a high-quality plan in place and that students and staff are prepared to follow it.

- **Give schools and other institutions a model for how to develop and implement reliable plans:** The Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security will release—by May 2013—a set of model, high-quality emergency management plans for schools, houses of worship, and institutions of higher education, along with best practices for developing these plans and training students and staff to follow them. In addition, the Department of Homeland Security, in coordination with the Department of Justice, will assist interested schools, houses of worship, and institutions of higher education in completing their own security assessments.

- **Help schools develop and implement emergency plans:** Congress should provide $30 million of one-time grants to states to help their school districts develop and implement emergency management plans. But schools also need to take responsibility for getting effective plans in place. Going forward, Congress should require states and school districts that receive school safety funding from the Department of Education to have comprehensive, up-to-date emergency plans in place for all of their schools.

CREATE A SAFER CLIMATE AT SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

A report issued by the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education after the Columbine shooting found that one of the best things schools can do to reduce violence and bullying is to improve a school's climate and increase trust and communication between students and staff. Fortunately, we already have evidence-based strategies which have been found to reduce bullying and other problem behaviors like drug abuse or poor attendance, while making students feel safer at school and improving academic performance.

- **Help 8,000 schools create safer and more nurturing school climates:** With technical assistance from the Department of Education, 18,000 schools have already put in place

evidence-based strategies to improve school climate. These strategies involve certain steps for the whole school (like consistent rules and rewards for good behavior), with more intensive steps for groups of students exhibiting at-risk behavior, and individual services for students who continue to exhibit troubling behavior. The Administration is proposing a new, $50 million initiative to help 8,000 more schools train their teachers and other school staff to implement these strategies. The Administration will also develop a school climate survey, providing reliable data to help schools implement policies to improve climate.

- **Share best practices on school discipline:** Students who are suspended or expelled are far more likely to repeat a grade, not graduate, or become involved in the juvenile justice system. As a result, effective school discipline policies are critical to addressing school and community crime and violence issues. The Department of Education will collect and disseminate best practices on school discipline polices and help school districts develop and equitably implement their policies.

4: IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As President Obama said, "We are going to need to work on making access to mental health care as easy as access to a gun." Today, less than half of children and adults with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. While the vast majority of Americans with a mental illness are not violent, several recent mass shootings have highlighted how some cases of mental illness can develop into crisis situations if individuals do not receive proper treatment. We need to do more than just keep guns out of the hands of people with serious mental illness; we need to identify mental health issues early and help individuals get the treatment they need before these dangerous situations develop.

MAKE SURE STUDENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS GET TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Three-quarters of mental illnesses appear by the age of 24, yet less than half of children with diagnosable mental health problems receive treatment. And several recent mass shootings, including those at Newtown, Tucson, Aurora, and Virginia Tech, were perpetrated by students or other young people.

- **Reach 750,000 young people through programs to identify mental illness early and refer them to treatment:** We need to train teachers and other adults who regularly interact with students to recognize young people who need help and ensure they are referred to mental

health services. The Administration is calling for a new initiative, Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education), to provide this training and set up systems to provide these referrals. This initiative, which would reach 750,000 young people, has two parts:

- **Provide "Mental Health First Aid" training for teachers:** Project AWARE includes $15 million for training for teachers and other adults who interact with youth to detect and respond to mental illness in children and young adults, including how to encourage adolescents and families experiencing these problems to seek treatment.
- **Make sure students with signs of mental illness get referred to treatment:** Project AWARE also includes $40 million to help school districts work with law enforcement, mental health agencies, and other local organizations to assure students with mental health issues or other behavioral issues are referred to the services they need. This initiative builds on strategies that, for over a decade, have proven to decrease violence in schools and increase the number of students receiving mental health services.

- **Support individuals ages 16 to 25 at high risk for mental illness:** Efforts to prevent school shootings and other gun violence can't end when a student leaves high school. Individuals ages 16 to 25 are at high risk for mental illness, substance abuse, and suicide, but they are among the least likely to seek help. Even those who received services as a child may fall through the cracks when they turn 18. The Administration is proposing $25 million for innovative state-based strategies supporting young people ages 16 to 25 with mental health or substance abuse issues.

- **Help schools address pervasive violence:** Twenty-two percent of 14 to 17 year olds have witnessed a shooting in their lifetime. Research shows that exposure to community violence can impact children's mental health and development and can substantially increase the likelihood that these children will later commit violent acts themselves. To help schools break the cycle of violence, Congress should provide $25 million to offer students mental health services for trauma or anxiety, conflict resolution programs, and other school-based violence prevention strategies.

- **Train more than 5,000 additional mental health professionals to serve students and young adults:** Experts often cite the shortage of mental health service providers as one reason it can be hard to access treatment. To help fill this gap, the Administration is proposing $50 million to train social workers, counselors, psychologists, and other mental health professionals. This would provide stipends and tuition reimbursement to train more than 5,000 mental health professionals serving young people in our schools and communities.

- **Launch a national conversation to increase understanding about mental health:** The sense of shame and secrecy associated with mental illness prevents too many people from seeking help. The President is directing Secretaries Sebelius and Duncan to launch a national dialogue about mental illness with young people who have experienced mental illness, members of the faith community, foundations, and school and business leaders.

ENSURE COVERAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

While most mental illnesses are treatable, those with mental illness often can't get needed treatment if they don't have health insurance that covers mental health services. The Affordable Care Act will provide one of the largest expansions of mental health coverage in a generation by extending health coverage to 30 million Americans, including an estimated 6 to 10 million people with mental illness. The Affordable Care Act will also make sure that Americans can get the mental health treatment they need by ensuring that insurance plans cover mental health benefits at parity with other benefits.

- **Finalize requirements for private health insurance plans to cover mental health services:** The Administration will issue final regulations governing how existing group health plans that offer mental health services must cover them at parity under the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. In addition, the Affordable Care Act requires all new small group and individual plans to cover ten essential health benefit categories, including mental health and substance abuse services. The Administration intends to issue next month the final rule defining these essential health benefits and implementing requirements for these plans to cover mental health benefits at parity with medical and surgical benefits.

- **Make sure millions of Americans covered by Medicaid get quality mental health coverage:** Medicaid is already the biggest funder of mental health services, and the Affordable Care Act will extend Medicaid coverage to as many as 17 million hardworking Americans. There is some evidence that Medicaid plans are not always meeting mental health parity requirements today, an issue that will only become more important as Medicaid is expanded. The Administration is issuing a letter to state health officials making clear that these plans must comply with mental health parity requirements.