



Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Preparedness & Response

National Biodefense Science Board
Washington, D.C. 20201

September 22, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

On September 22, 2009, the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) requested that the National Biodefense Science Board (NBSB) convene the Disaster Mental Health (DMH) Subcommittee to assess the Department's progress in its efforts to better integrate mental and behavioral health into emergency preparedness and response activities.

At our public meeting on September 22, 2010, the NBSB adopted the five recommendations on "Integration of Mental and Behavioral Health in Federal Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery: Assessment and Recommendations." These recommendations are taken from a detailed September 2010 report of the Board's DMH Subcommittee, attached here.

The Federal Government has been addressing critical disaster mental and behavioral health issues for several years and progress has been made. However, recent events such as the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster have unequivocally demonstrated the critical need for America to fully address this issue. We urge prompt attention to implementing these recommendations.

In brief, we recommend that the Secretary:

1. Task the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leadership with fully implementing the eight recommendations approved by the NBSB in November 2008 to protect, preserve, and restore individual and community mental health.
2. Issue a common Department policy regarding disaster mental and behavioral health that encompasses the strengths and activities of Federal Agencies, and also develop a strategy to implement that policy.
3. Empower an office or Agency to serve as the operational leader for disaster mental and behavioral health integration within HHS.
4. Task senior HHS leaders to develop a set of coordinated and prioritized research goals and ensure the necessary support to reach these goals for disaster mental and behavioral health.
5. Create and maintain a structure by which disaster mental and behavioral health experts regularly assess progress toward integration of disaster mental and behavioral health activities.

The Board wholeheartedly endorses the findings of the DMH Subcommittee and acknowledges the importance and the challenges our Nation faces in adequately addressing mental and behavioral health issues in disaster settings, including the unique needs of children and people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

/s/ Patricia Quinlisk, M.D.

Patricia Quinlisk, M.D., M.P.H.
Chair, National Biodefense Science Board