



## **ENHANCING EATING DISORDERS RESEARCH: FIGHTING A DEADLY THREAT TO WOMEN'S HEALTH**

**Background:** Simply put, eating disorders pose a specific threat to women's health because this set of mental illnesses is commonly associated with particularly high rates of mortality and morbidity.

*Morbidity* -- Anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder and eating disorders not otherwise specified – directly result in co-occurring chronic diseases. A wealth of peer reviewed research show that eating disorders have serious health consequences including heart failure and other severe cardiac conditions, kidney failure, osteoporosis and gastrointestinal disorders. Binge eating (the most common eating disorder) is associated with obesity, heart disease, gall bladder disease and diabetes.

*Mortality* – A seminal 2007 study by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration revealed a strong link between serious mental illnesses and shortened life expectancy. Sadly, that larger finding has specific application in the context of eating disorders. According to the National Institute of Mental Health 1 in 10 women with anorexia nervosa dies of starvation, cardiac arrest, or some other medical complication. The risk of death among teenage girls with anorexia is 11 times greater than in disease-free adolescents. Indeed, anorexia has the highest death rate of any mental illness.

*Funding* – Despite the high morbidity and mortality rates of eating disorders, the research dollars committed to better understanding and treating them lag behind other diseases with similar lifetime prevalence rates. In 2011 NIH spent \$27 million on the study of eating disorders compared to \$169 million for autism, and \$264 million for schizophrenia.

**Legislative History:** In March 2011, Sen. Harkin introduced S. 481, the Federal Response to Eliminate Eating Disorders Act (the FREED Act). The legislation contains an important section that expands and coordinates biomedical eating disorders research at NIMH. In the absence of pending legislation to reauthorize the NIH, the Eating Disorders Coalition (EDC) is seeking other legislative vehicles to advance this important research agenda. In the past, Congress has taken specific steps to advance women's health research – breast cancer being the most prominent example – and eating disorders biomedical investigations could benefit from a similar congressional focus.

**Proposed FY 2013 Senate Labor/HHS Report Language:** *Eating Disorders* – The Committee continues to be concerned about the alarming effects of eating disorders on women's health including elevated mortality rates and associated health consequences including serious cardiac conditions, kidney failure, gastrointestinal disorders and osteoporosis. The Committee urges NIH to expand, intensify, and coordinate the activities of the NIH with respect to research on eating disorders and to examine the possibility of creating collaborative consortia on eating

disorders research with a specific emphasis on basic and clinical investigations into the causes, diagnosis and treatment of these conditions. The Committee requests an update on this topic in the fiscal year 2014 budget justification.

Note: Success! This report language appeared as written in the Senate, LHHS 2013 Appropriations bill, page 102.