

Press Release

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE
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Report Calls for New 'Home' to Address Health Disparities for Persons with Mental Illness

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Report available at www.TheNationalCouncil.org/ResourceCenter

Washington, DC, April 22, 2009 — Person-centered healthcare homes are critical to address significant health disparities for people with serious mental illnesses, according to a new report released today by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (National Council). The report, Behavioral Health/Primary Care Integration and the Person-Centered Healthcare Home, calls for creating a medical home for people with serious mental illnesses by introducing general healthcare capacity within mental health organizations, or by nurturing seamless partnerships between mental health and primary care providers.

People in the U.S. with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder die an average of 25 years sooner than other Americans, according to a 2007 study conducted by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. Three out of every five people with serious mental illnesses die from preventable, co-occurring chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and cardiopulmonary conditions.

“We’re helping people recover from mental illness when their lives are endangered due to neglect of other serious health issues,” said Linda Rosenberg, president and CEO of the National Council. “Healthcare homes can save and improve lives by providing seamless healthcare where it is most needed,” she emphasized.

Often, persons with serious mental illness are not able to access primary care settings. While community mental health organizations — that treat a majority of persons with serious mental illnesses — consider general healthcare for patients a priority, only one in two organizations has any general healthcare capacity, and less than one in three has the capacity to provide the services onsite, as revealed by a National Council survey. The National Council report describes a person-centered healthcare home as one that is equipped to care for the whole patient and manage multiple, interrelated and chronic health problems. The healthcare home offers preventive screening and health services, acute primary care, behavioral health, management of chronic health conditions, and end of life care. These services are supported by access to lab and x-ray facilities, medical/surgical specialties and hospital care. A team of primary and behavioral health specialists coordinates care management to reduce fragmentation, prevent avoidable conditions, and promote patient independence and self-care.

“Person-centered healthcare homes emphasize that mental health is a central part of healthcare; a key shift in perspective that can begin to address some significant health disparities for people with serious mental illnesses,” said Linda Rosenberg.

The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) association of 1,600 behavioral healthcare organizations that provide treatment and rehabilitation for mental illnesses and addictions disorders to nearly six million adults, children and families in communities across the country. The National Council and its members bear testimony to the fact that medical, social, psychological and rehabilitation services offered in community settings help people with mental illnesses and addiction disorders recover and lead productive lives.

