



### MENTAL HEALTH – TALKING POINTS AND ACTIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

#### TALKING POINTS FOR LEGISLATORS

- In 2006, healthcare costs reached 16 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product; mental disorders contributed to an estimated 6.2 percent of these healthcare costs.<sup>1</sup>
- According to the American Journal of Psychiatry, serious mental illnesses (SMIs), which afflict six percent of American adults, cost society \$193.2 billion in lost earnings each year.
- In the U.S., the annual economic, indirect cost of mental illness is estimated to be \$79 billion. Most of that amount, approximately \$63 billion, reflects the loss of productivity as a result of illnesses.<sup>2</sup>
- Without treatment, the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering: unnecessary disability; unemployment; substance abuse; homelessness; inappropriate incarceration; suicide; and wasted lives. The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than \$100 billion each year in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>
- In July 2007, a nationwide report indicated that male veterans are twice as likely to die by suicide as compared with their civilian peers in the general U.S. population.<sup>4</sup>
- Suicide is the eleventh-leading cause of death in the U.S. and the third-leading cause of death for people ages 10-24 years. More than 90 percent of those who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental disorder.<sup>5</sup>
- Treatment outcomes for people with even the most serious mental illnesses are comparable to outcomes for well-established general medical or surgical treatments for other chronic diseases. The early treatment rates for mental illnesses are 60-80 percent, which is well above the approximately 40-60 percent success rates for common surgical treatments for heart disease.<sup>6</sup>

#### ACTIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Support statewide awareness campaigns and peer education and support programs that assist individuals and families in managing mental illness.
- Create a state mental health caucus to provide a forum for stakeholders to increase awareness of mental health needs and assist in the development of legislative proposals.
- Support a comprehensive mental health benefit set, including evidenced-based treatment intervention for mental health and co-occurring disorders, in private and public health plans.
- Protect funding for mental health services and preventative programs to help improve access to mental health services for low-income adults, families, and children who are in need of care.
- Invest in data collection systems that allow for greater transparency and public accountability for meaningful outcomes.
- Provide incentives for behavioral health workforce development, including practicing in rural or underserved areas.
- Work collaboratively with local officials to provide better coordination with mental health service providers.
- Pursue policy options that provide business incentives and tax credits for training programs that promote workforce training, development, and long-term employment for mentally ill employees.
- Establish a “smart on crime” approach to assist eligible mentally ill prisoners, reduce repeat offenses, develop alternatives to incarceration, and introduce mental health programming teams into the criminal justice system.

<sup>1</sup> Poisal JA, Truffer C., Smith S., Sisko A., Cowan C., Keehan S., Dickensheets B: Health Spending Projections Through 2016: Modest Changes Obscure Part D's Impact. Health Aff (Millwood) 2007; 26:w242-w253

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, 1999

<sup>3</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness, “What is Mental Health Illness? Mental Illness Facts”

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, M.S., Huguot, N., McFarland, B., & Newsom, J.T. (2007). “Suicide among male veterans: A perspective population-based study.” *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health*, 61(7), 619-624.

<sup>5</sup> National Institute of Mental Health. “Suicide in the U.S.: Statistics and Prevention.” Available at [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/harmsway.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/harmsway.cfm).

<sup>6</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness, “Mental Illnesses: Treatment Saves Money & Makes Sense Fact Sheet,” March 2007