



National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

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January 8, 2009

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The Honorable David R. Obey Chair, Appropriations Committee and Labor/Health & Human Services U.S. House of Representatives H-218 Capitol Washington, DC 20515 FAX: 202-225-3509, 225-9476

The Honorable Tom Harkin Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/Health and Human Services U.S. Senate 131 Hart SOB Washington, DC 20510 FAX: 202-224-1360

Dear Representative Obey and Senator Harkin:

Due to the current economic crisis, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) is urging Congress to include a \$100 million net increase for the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (Block Grant) in the economic recovery bill.

NASMHPD represents the \$29.5 billion public mental health service delivery systems serving 6.1 million people annually in all 50 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia. It is the only national association to represent state mental health commissioners/directors and their agencies. In addition, NASMHPD has an affiliation with the approximately 220 state psychiatric hospitals. Our members administer and manage community-based systems of care for the millions of individuals with serious mental illness who at times require immediate access to a variety of inpatient facilities and psychiatric units in general hospitals but are often cared for successfully in the community.

With the unemployment rate at a record high and the number of foreclosures rising, more individuals are seeking the services of the public mental health system. Just one example of the increase in need is that the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a 24-hour service sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, has experienced a 28.9% increase in the number of calls it has received over the past year. The loss of employment and housing often has a deleterious impact on the entire family resulting in an increased demand for mental health services.

Despite this growing need, many states are under significant budget pressure and are being forced to cut back on mental health programs. A recent study by NASMHPD and the NASMHPD Research Institute (NRI) reports that 32 state mental health agencies (SMHAs) are experiencing budget shortfalls for this year and FY 2010, and, in response, all are reducing services. Even in states that have not indicated a budget shortfall, there is evidence of financial stress in the mental health system. SMHAs have cut programs including, but not limited to, state inpatient hospitals, clinic services, day services, and targeted case management. Cuts at the state level reverberate, impacting counties and other localities, as well as nonprofit organizations that serve individuals with mental health needs.

Although mental health treatment relies significantly on Medicaid funding, many individuals needing mental health services are not eligible for their state's Medicaid program and use state-provided services, many of which are funded through the Block Grant. The Block Grant program has not received any additional significant federal funds in almost a decade. An increase of \$100 million to the Block Grant (which would bring its total funding to only \$520.7 million) would greatly benefit the individuals who need services and have lost coverage due to the distressed economy.

We look forward to working with you in the future to develop strategies that can be undertaken to improve state budgets, the national economy and vital mental health programs, such as the Block Grant. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Elizabeth Prewitt, NASMHPD's Director of Government Relations, 66 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 302, Alexandria, VA, Fax: 703-548-9517, Phone: 703-682-5196, elizabeth.prewitt@nasmhpd.org.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Glover".

Robert W. Glover, PhD
Executive Director