



November 16, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Mental health budget cuts leave un-and-underinsured behind

SAN DIEGO— California has cut \$764.8 million—21.2 percent—from mental health care between fiscal years (FY) 2009 and 2012, according to a national report issued by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Proportionately, California ranks seventh among states that have made cuts since FY2009. During the same four-year period, South Carolina ranked highest with cuts totaling 39.3 percent, while North Dakota had the greatest increase by a total of 48.1 percent.

For FY2012 alone, California cut over \$177 million or 5.9 percent in mental health care from the previous year's budget.

The NAMI report outlines Medicaid pressures that threaten mental health care nationwide. Following the loss in June 2011 of “enhanced” federal matching funds under Medicaid that were part of economic stimulus legislation, states have had to fill the shortfall. In California the loss of enhanced funding was an estimated over \$1.8 billion.

Some states are shifting mental health care dollars to Medicaid in order to receive more federal funds under the current Medicaid “match” formula. The more that mental health care is provided through Medicaid, the greater the risk that uninsured or underinsured individuals living with serious mental illness will be left behind.

If the congressional “Super Committee” recommends cuts in Medicaid, later this month, additional pressures will come into play. Proposals for cuts in Medicaid range from \$75 to almost \$200 billion.

“It is now, at a time of continuing high employment, that people are in need of public mental health services more than ever,” said Shannon Jaccard, Executive Director of NAMI San Diego. “We cannot abandon people when they need help the most and, with these cuts, that’s exactly what is happening. When services don’t keep up with needs, people fall through the cracks.”

Across the country and in our own state, communities, families and businesses pay a high price when people do not get the mental health care they need. Mental illness leads major diseases in lost economic output, estimated at a global toll of \$16.3 trillion U.S. dollars from 2011-2030. Today, emergency rooms, homeless shelters and jails are struggling with the costly effects of people not getting the right care at the right time for their mental illnesses.

Yet, with the right care at the right time, people can experience recovery. At the same time, high costs can be avoided and productivity enhanced. During these tough times, elected officials have to make difficult decisions using the best information they can. NAMI’s budget report gives important data to help policy makers get the facts and understand the impacts.

“We urge people to contact the governor and Members of Congress and ask them to protect and strengthen mental health care and to ensure that people living with mental illness are not left behind,” said Jaccard.

NAMI San Diego is a non-profit organization that provides education, support services and advocacy to improve the lives of everyone affected by mental illnesses, which, really, is all of us in one way or another. Most recently, the San Diego branch was named Affiliate of the Year by NAMI National. They received this due to their consistent support of NAMI’s mission evidenced by the number of support groups, education classes, community outreach activities, seminars, and monthly meetings they offer at no cost to the public.

NAMI San Diego also runs a Family and Peer Support Helpline that offers free, safe, confidential information, referrals and support for people with mental illness and their loved ones. The number is (619) 543-1434 or (800) 523-5933.

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