



Today is the first anniversary of the release of New Hampshire’s Ten-Year Mental Health Plan. It was September 22, 2008 when the NH Department of Health and Human Services, the NH Community Behavioral Health Association, legislators, consumers, and mental health advocates lauded the Plan and its goals.

While the State’s current budget crisis has created a very immediate and serious emergency, the NH Community Behavioral Health Association reaffirms its commitment to moving the Ten-Year Mental Health Plan forward, to working collaboratively with DHHS and the Legislature, and to making sure that all members of the public with mental health needs are a priority in the coming year.

A fresh read of the Plan gives a continued admonition that the system is in crisis and needs to be restored. It also adds to the urgency of resolving the current budget challenges, and offers a reminder that we can work together, establish a shared goal, and work for success. A link to the 2008 Plan, Addressing the Critical Mental Health Needs of NH's Citizens can be found at <http://www.nhcbha.org/index.htm>.

The proponents of the Ten-Year Mental Health Plan were clear that “a public health crisis exists in New Hampshire’s mental health system.” No one challenged this observation in September 2008, and there was hope that with a plan in place, action would be undertaken. Yet, under-budgeting for Medicaid mental health costs are now exacerbating the situation and threaten to erode the very foundation of reforms that were forged in the Ten-Year Plan.

The week before the Ten-Year Plan was released, the Legislature and Governor approved emergency funds for home heating assistance for low-income NH residents, showing that government can act quickly when there is need and when there is a commitment to take care of the most vulnerable members of the public. Perhaps the same can happen in 2009, before a deepening mental health crisis strikes NH.