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PRESS RELEASE

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COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS ISSUE ALERT

Local Centers Warn That CMS Rule Will Mean Cuts in Services

Concord, NH: Following up on April's news that New Hampshire's community mental health centers are facing severe financial threats, the NH Community Behavioral Health Association (NHCBA) has issued an alert and call to action to over 600 health care advocates, legislators and other opinion leaders. The combination of new federal rules, state revenue shortfalls, and increased limits on insurance and Medicaid benefits are pointing to a funding crisis in the state's behavioral health system that may impact the availability of critical community services.

Jay Couture, chair of NHCBA, sent out a letter last week warning of cutbacks in services and even closure of some centers if a change in direction is not made soon. The letter identified the proposed case management rule from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) as potentially the most crippling factor. The CMS rule would effectively undo the bundled rate under which the centers now provide community behavioral health services and could lead to as much as a 40% reduction in reimbursements the centers now receive.

"Clearly, the centers will not be able to operate if their reimbursement is cut by 40%," Couture said. She noted that the centers receive as much as 80% of their reimbursements from Medicaid and that the CMS rule could mean \$20M in losses for the ten non-profit centers over the next year. Congress is still considering a moratorium - which NHCBA supports - but even within the moratorium legislation, there is a definition change for case management services. The impact of changing the definition has not yet been determined.

Couture's letter also reminded policymakers that it is state law and state policy that require the mental health centers to provide community behavioral health services for all NH citizens who present themselves for care whether they are eligible for Medicaid, have other resources or have no resources at all. The ten centers now provide care to over 41,000 children and adults with some form of mental illness. Without these services, impacts on hospital emergency rooms,

county and state correctional facilities and local police and welfare departments will be immediate, and the public health and safety of the state as a whole could be jeopardized. But the most serious negative impacts of a reduction in or elimination of these services will be felt by the citizens of New Hampshire who rely on the community mental health centers to achieve their recovery goals.

Couture said that the NHCBA hopes to convene policy makers later this year to develop a plan for moving forward. She added that the centers will continue to fulfill their mission of providing critical mental health services to communities, children and families throughout the process.

About NHCBA

The NH Community Behavioral Health Association is an organization comprised of the ten community mental health centers throughout New Hampshire. These centers serve individuals in our state who are living with—and recovering from—mental illness and emotional disorders. In fiscal year 2006, this network of mental health centers provided ongoing and emergency behavioral health services to over 41,000 New Hampshire residents, a number that includes over 11,000 children.

The goal of the Association is to raise awareness about the crucial role played by community-based mental health centers to ensure public safety and overall public health for all New Hampshire residents through their provision of recovery oriented services. In addition, the NHCBA serves as an advocate for a strong mental health system across New Hampshire.