



1 Pillsbury Street, Suite 200 Concord, NH 03301-3570 603-225-6633 FAX 603-225-4739

## PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 3, 2009

CONTACT:  
James Monahan  
603-228-3322

# FORUMS ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM ANNOUNCED

Five regional listening sessions planned by mental health advocates

**Concord, NH:** The NH Community Behavioral Health Association (NHCBHA), in collaboration with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the NH Mental Health Council (NHMHC), has announced a series of listening sessions on the subject of behavioral health services in New Hampshire.

The public forums, funded by a grant from the Endowment for Health, are intended to bring the state's Ten Year Mental Health Plan and behavioral health issues in general to the public; and to then bring the public's comments on the plan and the current delivery system to the policy makers.

The schedule for the sessions, between February 6<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, is timed to highlight the beginning of the 2009 Legislature's budget deliberations. (The Governor makes his 2010-2011 budget presentation to the Legislature on February 12<sup>th</sup>.) The dates and locations for the sessions are:

- Friday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 to 12 pm, at the Portsmouth Library- Levinson Room, 175 Parrott Ave., Portsmouth
- Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, from 8:30 to 10:30 am, at the Meredith Village Savings Bank, 379 South Main Street, Laconia
- Tuesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, at the Merrimack County Commissioner's Office, Lower level conference room, Concord
- Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, at Cheshire Medical Center, Auditoriums A & B, Keene
- Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 to 12 pm, at the Manchester Health Department, Manchester

Jay Couture, chair of NHCBA, said, “We need to give families, providers, community leaders and others the opportunity to share their experiences with and comments on the current behavioral health services delivery system. We have been issuing warnings of possible cutbacks in services and even closure of some community mental health centers in light of the state’s fiscal crisis, and we want policy makers to understand what the impacts will be on citizens and communities.”

Couture continued: “The state’s Ten Year Mental Health Plan is subtitled, ‘A Strategy for Restoration’, for a reason: we need to look at where users of the community-based delivery system have been diverted – to hospitals, county jails, and the already over-stressed New Hampshire Hospital - and how we can restore the system by directing those in need to more appropriate, cost-effective and local options.”

Couture said that the NHCBA has worked closely with NAMI, DHHS, and the NHMHC to plan and coordinate the five regional forums, and that follow up will include a report of what the advocates hear at each listening session. The report will be used as an educational tool for legislators and others during the upcoming budget deliberations at the statehouse. “We all know that the Legislature and Governor will need to make some tough decisions this year, and we want to provide the very best input we can by delivering the public’s concerns about the behavioral health system to them,” she said.

#### 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 2008, this network of mental health centers provided ongoing and emergency behavioral health services to over 47,000 New Hampshire residents, a number that includes over 12,000 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.