

PRESS RELEASE

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NH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES AGAIN SEE CUTS

Mental Health Centers and State's Hospitals Warn of Public Health Crisis

Concord, NH: Effective August 1st, the State of NH has cut an additional \$1 million from community mental health centers. The action came about as a consequence of recommendations by the Governor, legislative enactments, and state agency rate setting. The cut will reduce Medicaid payments to the 10 community mental health centers that have already seen dramatic reductions, at the same time that case loads have been rising steadily in recent months. To carry out this directive, the Department of Health and Human Services imposed a rate reduction for functional support services (FSS) at the ten centers, effective yesterday, August 1st.

Jay Couture, President of the NH Community Behavioral Health Association, said, "This new blow to the community mental health system is just the latest in a series of rate cuts that have occurred in the past two years. In April 2008, a \$4.6 million dollar rate reduction required cutbacks in staff, employee benefits, and some direct services at the ten centers. And last October, we saw cuts of \$3 million to the ten centers as a result of the Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to keep itself on budget." Couture added, "The impact of cuts to these services is felt in the daily lives of mental health consumers and their families at hospitals, and by local law enforcement. The community-based mental health delivery system is in crisis, and budget cuts and down shifting of responsibility is contributing to a worsening of this crisis. This action might help the State budget in the short term, but it just shifts the burden to others. "

At the same time that these actions have been taken by the State, caseloads at the mental health centers have risen. In response to the growing problem, NH Hospital recently brought back some inpatient beds that had been temporarily closed. We're pleased that NH Hospital leaders were able to

make more beds available, but remain concerned that some of the more than 47,000 children and adults who need services are at risk of being displaced to other providers and other settings. As an example, New Hampshire's acute care hospitals are seeing a marked increase in emergency room visits that are behavioral health-related; and with limited bed space at NH Hospital, individuals who need this level of care may have their admissions to that facility delayed.

"The stress that the demand for these services has put on our hospitals this year alone is tremendous," said Steve Ahnen, President of the NH Hospital Association, "and we're concerned that those suffering a serious, acute mental health crisis may be prevented from getting the right care, at the right time and in the right place."

The NH Hospital Association and the Community Behavioral Health Association are committed to seeking a solution, but repeated budget cuts are making that job much more difficult.

About CBHA

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. In addition, the Association serves as an advocate for a strong mental health system across New Hampshire.

About the NH Hospital Association

Hospitals have been collaborating through the New Hampshire Hospital Association since 1934. The Association's mission is to enhance the clinical and economic performance of hospitals, improve public confidence in hospitals, and expand access to coverage and care for all citizens of New Hampshire.