

Mental Health Liaison Group

CONTACT: Carole Szpak
202/393-6700, ext. 101
comm@naphs.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MENTAL HEALTH GROUPS URGE VICE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE TO INCLUDE A FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH CARE

(Washington, DC, January 15, 2013).....In a letter to Vice President Biden's Gun Violence Task Force 39 national associations representing consumers, hospitals, and community services for individuals experiencing mental and addictive disorders thanked the Vice President for his leadership on the task force and are ready to work with him and the Administration on the goal of improving mental health care in America.

The MHLG recommended to the Vice President the following seven issues that must be addressed to prevent senseless violence and improve access to effective mental health care.

1. **Improve prevention, early identification, and intervention in mental health care.** It is well-documented that social support and timely mental health treatment can promote well-being and prevent crises. Too often, what in hindsight are clear signs of the need for mental health care are not identified until after a crisis occurs. It is also important to implement programs to respond compassionately to people in crisis and to prevent a crisis from escalating.
2. **Provide mental health and violence-prevention education and training to school personnel, law enforcement, families, primary care physicians, and members of the community to educate them about how to identify and respond to youth and adults experiencing mental health crises, promoted through a public awareness campaign.** Too often those in a position to help do not know what to do when a child or adult manifests the early signs and symptoms of mental illness.
3. **Implement school-based mental health services and supports.** We are clearly not addressing the needs of students struggling with mental health conditions in many of our nation's schools. With effective school-based mental health services and supports and coordination with the community mental health system, many of these students could stay in school and earn an academic degree and a more promising future. Yet school-employed mental health professionals are often the first casualties of school budget cuts, a decision that can negatively affect important services to students and staff.
4. **Increase the qualified mental health workforce.** Throughout the nation, there are critical shortages in the availability of qualified mental health professionals. In many communities, children and adults are placed on long waiting lists to access mental health services.
5. **Fully implement key provisions of the *Affordable Care Act*, including mental health and addictions parity requirements.** Passage of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) was a seminal achievement in improving health and mental health care in this country. We are grateful for your leadership on health care and urge continued leadership in ensuring full and effective implementation of the ACA.
6. **Protect federal funding of Medicaid.** Youth and adults with mental illnesses are among the largest, most important class of Medicaid beneficiaries. Forty-eight percent of all public mental health services in America are funded through Medicaid. Reductions in federal funding of

Medicaid would have a devastating impact on people with mental illnesses, many of whom rely on this vital safety-net program for both working toward and maintaining recovery and independence.

7. **Protect federal funding.** We encourage the Administration to support an increase in funding for mental health supports and services in FY2014 and to stave off any cuts during any fiscal negotiations this spring.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is an advocacy coalition on mental health issues. View the MHLG letter to the Vice President Biden's Gun Violence Task Force at www.mhlg.org under "Latest News."

####