

National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging

It's not just health --- it's *mental* health!

www.ncmha.org

The National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging (NCMHA) has worked over the past year to advocate for the inclusion of mental health and substance abuse issues at the **2005 White House Conference on Aging**. We are happy to report that issues for which we advocated are among the Top 10 WHCoA Policy Resolutions. We are particularly enthusiastic that 75% of conference delegates voted to improve "recognition, assessment, and treatment of mental illness and depression among older Americans." The critical task we now face is assuring that the WHCoA process moves forward from words to action! We strongly encourage the aging and mental health community to remain involved in the WHCoA process - stay in contact with your Governors, policy makers and WHCoA delegates to assure that the WHCoA Preliminary report (which the Governors receive this month) and the Final report include specific implementation strategies to attain the resolutions. We wish to share implementation strategies that NCMHA has developed to support your efforts. We also wish to encourage continued advocacy for the inclusion of the specific words "mental health" in implementation strategies related to health – including health care, long-term care, Medicare and Medicaid, workforce and research. Mental health is a key component of health, but it often is overlooked if not clearly stated.

WHCoA Resolution 8: Improve recognition, assessment, and treatment of mental illness and depression among older Americans.

Implementation strategies:

- Assure access to an affordable and comprehensive range of quality mental health and substance abuse services including outreach, home and community based care, prevention, intervention, acute care, and long-term care.
- Assure that services are age appropriate, culturally competent, consumer driven, and provided by individuals who are trained and experienced working with older adults.
- Amend statutes that address public and private health and long-term care insurance plans to:
 - a. guarantee parity in coverage and reimbursement for mental health, physical health, and substance abuse disorders
 - b. eliminate exclusions based on pre-existing conditions
 - c. ensure that benefits packages provide full access to a comprehensive range of coordinated and quality services
- Promote the development and implementation of home and community-based care as an alternative to institutionalization through a variety of public and private funding mechanisms.
- Support the integration of older adult mental health and substance abuse services into primary health care, long term care, and community-based service systems.
- Promote screening for co-occurring mental and substance use disorders and encourage the development of integrated treatment strategies.
- Implement Recommendation 1.1 of the 2003 Presidents New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Final Report: "to advance and implement a national campaign to reduce the stigma of seeking care and a national strategy for suicide prevention" incorporating an emphasis on older adults.

WHCoA Resolution 4: Strengthen and improve the Medicare program for seniors.

WHCoA Resolution 5: Strengthen and Improve the Medicaid program for seniors.

Implementation strategies:

- Guarantee parity in coverage and reimbursement for mental health and substance abuse services, as compared to physical health services, in the Medicare and Medicaid programs.
- Ensure that older persons who are eligible for Medicare have access to a full range of medications.
- Improve and effectively coordinate benefits for those individuals who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid coverage.
- Identify older adults as a priority population for public mental health and substance abuse program funding.

- Increase collaboration among aging, health, mental health, and substance abuse consumer organizations, advocacy groups, professional associations, academic institutions, research entities, and all relevant government agencies to promote more effective use of resources and to reduce fragmentation of services.

WHCoA Resolution 6: Support geriatric education and training for all health care professionals, paraprofessionals, health profession students, and direct care workers.

WHCoA Resolution 9: Attain adequate numbers of healthcare personnel in all professions who are skilled, culturally competent, and specialized in geriatrics.

Implementation strategies:

- Actively seek to attract new providers in mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse for older adults by expanding financial incentives such as geriatric traineeships, loan forgiveness programs and continuing education.
- Require that professional mental health and behavioral health education programs that receive federal funding introduce geriatric course work or rotation for all students that includes promotion of evidence based and emerging best practices and skills in treating people with co-occurring mental and addictive disorders.
- Require federal programs to promote interdisciplinary training and education.
- Encourage states to revise licensing and continuing education requirements so that geriatric mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse training are required for all licensed health, mental health and social services professionals.
- Eliminate disparities in reimbursement between geriatric mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse practice and other areas of mental health and health care practice.

WHCoA Resolution 29: Promote innovative evidence-based and practice-based medical and aging research.

WHCoA Resolution 39: Apply evidence based research to the delivery of health and social services where appropriate.

Implementation strategies:

- Promote older adult mental health and substance abuse research, and coordinate and finance the movement of evidence-based and emerging best practices from research to service delivery and workforce training programs.
- Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to refine its approach to technology transfer in geriatric mental health and behavioral health evidence-based and emerging best practices to ensure that knowledge is translated more rapidly into the content of training curricula, that curricula employ teaching methods of demonstrated effectiveness, and that knowledge about effective education, recruitment, and retention strategies inform all public and private efforts to translate science to services.
- Conduct research to assess the efficacy of prevention and treatment approaches for older adults (including peer support groups).

WHCoA Resolution 31: Support older adult caregivers raising their relatives' children.

Implementation strategy:

- Recognize and support the role of caregivers and provide supportive services to assist them in their efforts, e.g., support groups, respite care, and counseling.