

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

A Roadmap for Federal Action on America's Mental Health Crisis

July 2005

Executive Summary

Three years ago, President Bush established the New Freedom Initiative, dedicated to ensuring that people with disabilities, including those with mental disorders, have “the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, choose where to live and participate in community life.”

A key component of the New Freedom initiative was the appointment of an independent, nonpartisan commission charged with assessing America's mental health system and making recommendations for improvements.

The final report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, released in July 2003, offered hope for millions of Americans and their families who are affected by mental disorders. The Commission found that recovery from mental illness is possible and that promoting recovery — not merely managing symptoms — should be the driving goal of America's public mental health system.

The report made clear that effective and cost-effective treatments exist, and that early identification and intervention can prevent the negative consequences associated with unmet mental health needs.

Unfortunately, the Commission also found that the system designed to provide services to people who need mental health care is “fragmented and in disarray, lead[ing] to unnecessary and costly disability, homelessness, school failure and incarceration.” As a result, only a fraction of the people who need services get them, and most individuals cannot access the services that would best increase their independence.

The Commission's final report called for “fundamental transformation” of the mental health system as the only option for meaningful reform. Outlining goals and recommendations to provide a framework for such transformation, the report raised hopes that people who have mental disorders could and would realize the promise of leading more productive and independent lives in their communities.

To date, however, there has been little progress in realizing the Commission's goals or implementing its recommendations. For millions of Americans with mental disorders and their families, the consequences of this inaction have been tragic and sometimes fatal. Since the release of the Commission's final report:

- More than 63,000 Americans have been victims of suicide.
- An estimated 206,000 people with mental illnesses were admitted to state and federal prisons — many of them incarcerated due to the consequences of homelessness and neglect.

- More than 25,000 families relinquished custody of their children to child welfare or juvenile justice systems because it appeared to be the only way to secure the mental health services their children needed.
- Juvenile detention centers spent \$200 million warehousing children — some as young as 7 years old — because needed mental health services were unavailable in the community.
- As many as 13 percent of the thousands of veterans who have returned from military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are estimated to show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Left untreated, PTSD can lead to suicide, unemployment, divorce, and misery for veterans and their families.
- The American economy lost an estimated \$158 billion in productivity due to unaddressed mental health needs.

Continued inaction is unacceptable. The tremendous human and financial costs of unmet mental health needs must be addressed.

Immediate federal action is needed if access, recovery and quality services are to become the hallmarks of America's public mental health system.

Seven Steps to Successful Mental Health Reform

Rooted in the promise of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, this *Roadmap for Federal Action on America's Mental Health Crisis* reflects the widely accepted view that mental health reform is essential: The federal government must act now to reduce preventable suicides, lost productivity, high rates of homelessness, unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system and other consequences of America's failed mental health policies.

The Campaign for Mental Health Reform presents the *Roadmap* as a constructive set of steps and action items to implement the vision of the President's New Freedom Commission. Effective transformation — and fulfillment of the promise of the New Freedom initiative — is possible only with improved federal leadership in each of the following areas:

Step 1: Maximize the effectiveness of scarce resources by coordinating programs and making systems “seamless” to consumers.

Action Items:

- *Create a federal interagency task force to review and align federal programs affecting people with mental disorders.*
- *Reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and provide incentives to develop and implement individualized, comprehensive plans of care, and promote state and local interagency planning regarding mental health services delivery and financing.*
- *To the greatest extent possible, assess the impact of proposed laws and regulations on people with disabilities and require Disability Impact Statements.*

Step 2: Stop making criminals of those whose mental illness results in inappropriate behavior.

Action Items:

- *Fund programs to divert people with mental illnesses who have committed nonviolent crimes into treatment instead of jail or prison.*
- *Eliminate “warehousing” of youth with mental disorders in juvenile justice facilities.*
- *Promote successful community re-entry through prompt reinstatement of Social Security disability benefits, Medicaid, and other federal benefits when individuals with mental illnesses are released from jail or prison.*

Step 3: Make Medicaid accountable for the effectiveness of the mental health services it pays for.

Action Items:

- *Provide cost-effective home- and community-based care in lieu of institutional care, whenever possible.*
- *Amend federal Medicaid law to cover room and board costs for therapeutic foster care placements under Medicaid.*
- *Give people a real say in deciding what kinds of treatment and services they need.*
- *Permit states to provide a comprehensive array of critical mental health services that combine rehabilitation, clinic services, and targeted case management under a single Medicaid option.*
- *Require states to coordinate Medicaid policy changes that affect people with mental disorders with State Mental Health Plans.*
- *Establish a Technical Assistance Center on Mental Health to provide information and guidance to state Medicaid directors and mental health providers.*

Step 4: Prevent the negative consequences of mental disorders by getting the right services to the right people at the right time.

Action Items:

- *Promote early detection of mental disorders and, when appropriate, early intervention services for at-risk mothers and children who receive health care at federally funded maternal and child health clinics.*
- *End discrimination against mental health treatment in Medicare and cover essential services.*
- *Ensure that the primary health care needs of adults and children who receive services through the public mental health system are met.*
- *Require parity in private health insurance plans.*
- *Permit presumptive eligibility for SSI and Medicaid for people who are homeless and have a serious mental illness.*
- *Develop a comprehensive strategic plan to address mental health workforce issues and pass legislation to redefine and expand the Mental Health Professional Shortage Area Designation program.*

Step 5: Invest in children and support and value their families' role in making treatment decisions.

Action Items:

- *Pass legislation to allow families to buy-into Medicaid to access services for a child with a disability.*
- *Track the incidence of children being placed in child welfare and juvenile justice systems solely to obtain mental health services.*
- *Support state efforts to establish interagency systems of care for children.*

Step 6: Promote independence by increasing employment, eliminating disincentives for economic self-sufficiency and ending homelessness.

Action Items:

- *Eliminate disincentives to work and self-sufficiency that are inherent in the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program.*
- *Help people with mental illnesses join the workforce by reforming the payment system used under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Act of 1999 (TWWIA).*
- *Promote integration of federal and state vocational rehabilitation funding into state and local (including county) mental health budgets.*
- *Maintain HUD's Section 8 housing programs as a viable safety net for people with mental disabilities who are at risk of homelessness.*
- *Create a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund to build, rehabilitate and preserve 1.5 million units of rental housing by the end of the decade.*

Step 7: Address the mental health needs of returning veterans and their families.

Action Items:

- *Provide early identification and effective treatment for returning veterans at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and their families.*
- *Provide effective mental health and substance abuse treatment and services to veterans.*

The Campaign for Mental Health Reform is a national partnership of groups representing millions of people with mental or emotional disorders, their families, service providers, administrators and other concerned Americans. *Emergency Response* is the Campaign's call to action and roadmap for reform.

In developing this *Roadmap* and the action items set forth below, the Campaign for Mental Health Reform and its members consulted with hundreds of state, county and local government officials, mental health consumers and their families, and state and local mental health advocates about how they viewed federal leadership and what the federal government can do to support mental health systems transformation. We conducted site visits to key states and to effective community mental health programs to learn from their transformation efforts and identify recommendations for change at the federal level.

We hope this *Roadmap* will inspire federal leadership to keep the New Freedom Commission's promise that people with mental disorders be afforded "the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, choose where to live and participate in community life."

The Campaign for Mental Health Reform

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill)

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Empowerment Center

National Mental Health Association

National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse

Suicide Prevention Action Network USA

USPRA (United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association)

July 2005

"People with disabilities want to be employed, educated, and participating citizens living in the community. In today's global new economy, America must be able to draw on the talents and creativity of all of its citizens."

-- George W. Bush

President of the United States