



Coalition Briefs

A SEMI-MONTHLY UPDATE ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW YORK

Unfinished business (and lots of it)

On Thursday, June 22nd the 2000 legislative session in Albany ended. Legislators returned home to prepare for party conventions and gear up their campaign machines. Unfortunately, before they left Albany they failed to pass some key pieces of legislation for which the mental health community had been pushing.

Work and Wellness Act of 2000

In order to benefit from the Federal Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA), New York State must pass implementing legislation. The Work and Wellness Act of 2000 would remove one of the primary barriers preventing people with disabilities from joining or rejoining the work force. Currently Medicaid benefits are cut off completely when a person with a disability earns too much. The WIIA would enable people to buy in to Medicaid on a sliding scale based on their income level. The mental health advocacy community has joined with advocates for people with physical disabilities and people with HIV/AIDS to push for passage of this law. On June 5th the Assembly unanimously passed its version of the law, sponsored by Brooklyn's Assemblyman James Brennan. The Senate bill, sponsored by Staten Island's Senator John Marchi, never made it to the floor for a vote.

On Wednesday, June 21st The Coalition joined in support of a rally that brought nearly 200 people to Albany to make a final push to encourage Governor Pataki to push a law that he has publicly supported in principle. At that rally nine people with physical and mental disabilities and HIV/AIDS were arrested for handcuffing themselves to Governor Pataki's door. Unfortunately, even this level of commitment and anger failed to con-

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SNPs to sunset shortly

On June 30, 2000 the legislation authorizing Mental Health Special Needs Plans (SNP) will sunset. All of the other parts of the HCFA 1115 waiver authorization were extended for three years as part of the budget process in order to recognize the savings in the bill. The section of the legislation related to SNPs, however, was not included in the blanket reauthorization. The legislative session has concluded without agreement on how to extend the SNP authorizing legislation, so the years of hard work and preparation will not come to fruition with mental health SNPs.

On June 13th the Assembly passed a one-year extension of the authorizing legislation with a requirement for an independent actuary to study the methodology used to construct the RFP. On June 14th the Senate passed a three-and-a-half-year extension with a similar requirement for an independent actuarial analysis. Neither bill included the financial protections The Coalition felt were critical to ensuring the viability of the community-based system. The Coalition, which represents community-based organizations that were members of both winning and non-winning SNP bidders remained concerned about risk to the field as a whole, but was hopeful that a compromise could be reached that would move the SNP process forward and protect providers at the same time. We are disappointed that an agreement was not reached.

In spite of the difficulties that the past six weeks of negotiations have engendered, The Coalition believes that there was much of value in the SNP concept. We hope to continue to work with OMH and our elected leadership to organize care and identify new ways to redirect inpatient money to rehabilitation and recovery programs for people with severe mental illnesses. ©

OMH reorganizes

The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) has reorganized some of its operations in order to better meet the agency's top priorities of **A**ccountability, **B**est Practices and **C**oordination. The main realignment is of operations resources into a Division of State Psychiatric Center Management (under Al Holmes) and a Division of Community Care Systems Management (under Linda Rosenberg, CSW). In addition, all quality assurance and clinical issues will be moved to the Office of the Chief Medical Officer. For a copy of the entire new table of organization please contact Dena Mitchell-Koppoe at x105. ©

Sweet sixteen

On June 15th Pfizer played host to the 16th Annual Mental Health Awards. This year's honorees, Michael Winerip, Dr. Harvey Bluestone, Gail Nayowith and Celia Brown were feted by a very good turnout. Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services Commissioner Neal Cohen presented a proclamation from Mayor Giuliani declaring June 15, 2000 Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies Day in New York City. City Council staffers Richard Alleyne and Jose Arango presented a proclamation signed by City Council Speaker Peter

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Mission accomplished

An embarrassment of riches was presented to attendees of *Mission for the 21st Century: Employment Services for People with Mental Illness*. The June 20th conference highlighted how much skill, talent and passion can be brought to bear on the problem of unemployment among people with psychiatric disabilities. Philip Saperia provided the welcoming remarks and discussed the ambitious goals of the New York Work Exchange which are to provide training, technical assistance, information and research to improve vocational outcomes for community-based mental health agencies.

State Office of Mental Health Commissioner James Stone and City Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services Commissioner Neal Cohen lent their considerable clout to the conference and the undertaking by joining us to present their vision for the future, one in which unemployment rates for peo-

ple with mental illness are no higher than for anyone else. International Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services COO Ruth Hughes gave a motivating keynote speech on the pitfalls of adopting a single model. She provided research and evidence to demonstrate that different clients need different types and levels of support. Pope Simmons and Edwin Lopez-Soto did an excellent job guiding the group through the complexities of crucial federal legislation and regulations: the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA)

The afternoon was similarly compelling. Panel presentations demonstrated the breadth of interest and expertise we have in New York City. Panels responded to the vision laid out by the two Commissioners, addressed ways to manage symptoms in the workplace and provided the crucial consumer perspective.

We are very grateful to the presenters who expended so much time and energy to put together such excellent presentations and to all of those who joined us. We look forward to continuing to work together to accomplish our mission. ©

New site makes news

Pfizer, Inc. has launched a new website that provides assistance to voluntary health associations and their staffs. The site, at www.viewsmakingnews.com, includes information about public policy and how to influence it, association leadership tips, fundraising advice and legislative calendars. "Pfizer is pleased to offer this resource to our voluntary health care partners and to all individuals and organizations interested in health care public policy and association management skills," said Dr. Nina Hill, Pfizer's Director of Civic Affairs. The site can be reached through the Coalition's website at www.cvmha.org. ©

Mental Health Awards

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Vallone honoring The Coalition. Public Advocate Mark Green and representatives of Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields and State Senator Daniel Hevesi were also in attendance.

Special recognition and gratitude must be expressed to some of those who made the event possible. Without the generosity and support of Pfizer's Director of Civic Affairs Dr. Nina Hill, the tireless efforts of Judeth Podell, the dedication of Meggan Christman, Dena Mitchell-Koppoe and Boris Yagudayev and the support of all of our member agencies, the Mental Health Awards would not have happened. We cannot thank you enough. ©

Unfinished business

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vince the Governor to move. The Medicaid Buy-In coalition has, however, vowed not to disappear quietly. Rallies and demonstrations are being planned for the entire summer.

Mental Health Insurance Parity

Once again New York State's legislature has failed to end our state's tacit approval of discrimination by insurance companies against people with mental illness. Despite the best efforts of long-time parity champion Jim Brennan to move the bill more expeditiously than ever this year, the Senate has once again stood in the way of non-discriminatory insurance. The Assembly passed its parity bill unanimously, very early, on January 24th. The Senate, on the other hand, failed to do the same.

Despite the tremendous efforts of advocates who lined up two-thirds of the Republican Senate majority as co-sponsors, when the procedural votes to bring the bill to the floor for a vote were cast, they fell strictly along party lines, with the majority ending the bills chances.

Advocates do not plan to be quiet about this major gap in the civil rights of people with mental illness either. Along with the long-time picnics for parity, the picket for parity has been added to the advocacy arsenal. Expect more of them.

Presumptive Medicaid Eligibility

When a New Yorker with a mental illness is released from jail, prison or a State psychiatric facility s/he is ineligible for Medicaid for at least the 30-90 days the application process takes. This critical period of transition back into the community is the worst possible time to be without health care coverage. For decades this bureaucratic barrier has prevented people from accessing the care they need resulting in countless costly relapses. The recently enacted Assisted Outpatient Treatment law would provide medications during this period, but does not have a mechanism to cover treatment or rehabilitative care.

The Coalition has worked very closely this year with allies from the Urban Justice Center and Correctional Association to address this problem. Efforts to include it in the budget were stymied, but this campaign also will not end with the session. ©

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Member Notes

Peter D. Beitchman, DSW will take over the position of Executive Director of **The Bridge** starting on Monday, July 3rd. Current Executive Director Murray Itzkowitz, DSW will become Executive Director Emeritus. Dr. Itzkowitz will lead The Bridge's research efforts and support new program development. Of his new role, Dr. Beitchman said, "As Executive Director of **The Bridge** I look forward not only to helping guide the agency into a bright future, but also to working with my Coalition colleagues to help achieve the promise of community mental health for the seriously mentally ill."©

The Association for Rehabilitative Case Management and Housing has completed a consumer satisfaction survey. Among the encouraging results are the following:

- 77% of clients are registered voters;
- 79% feel **The Association** helps them manage their lives better;
- 87% feel their concerns are responded to adequately;
- 88% feel they have privacy in their living arrangements.

Other significant findings are that most clients use the conveniences of their neighborhoods for shopping, dining, banking and postal services. Truly community-based mental health care.©

Weston United Community Renewal seeks Intake/Clerical Unit Generalist for Hispanic clubhouse program in E. Harlem. Resp. include teaching basic computer operations to consumers, all aspects of intake process & clerical support for staff. Also resp. for gathering stats for City & State agencies. Good verbal & writing skills & computer literate. BA or equivalent work exp. in mental illness environment. Read & speak Spanish. Salary in the \$20s w/benefits. Fax resume: 212-316-0789.©

Going the wrong way

The MTA has published a revised half-fare application that is so badly flawed it may throw the whole program off track. The current application informs physicians that in order to get half-fare benefits, SSI recipients must be unable to work. Not only is this requirement not included in the statute, it directly contradicts the intention of the law, to enable people with psychiatric disabilities to return to work. We are working to have the application changed.©

103 psych meds in pipeline

On June 20th the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) released the results of a survey indicating that 103 new medicines are currently being developed to treat mental illnesses. Of those 26 are aiming at depression, 24 are focused on Alzheimer's, 16 have set sights on schizophrenia and 13 are targeted at anxiety disorders. The text of the press release can be found at <http://www.phrma.org/news/6-20-00.html>.©

Schedule change

The Provider Academy, *Managing Change in the New World Order of Managed Care*, scheduled for July 20th, 2000 has been rescheduled. Please join us on October 17th, 2000 in The Coalition's training room at 90 Broad Street.©

— Help Wanted —

Safe Horizon seeks FT & PT Therapists & FT Clinical Supervisor w/exp. to work in trauma-centered, NYS licensed Mental Health Clinic in downtown Brooklyn. CSW req. & bi-lingual pref. Fax resume, cover letter & salary req. to N. Arnow @ (212) 577-3897.©

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. is seeking an experienced, highly motivated & analytic individual for Staff Associate. Juris Doctor degree or MA in Public Policy, Health Policy or Social Welfare is req. Will carry a portfolio of issues & manage several task forces & projects to evaluate the effects of public policies on children & families and assess whether services are adequate. Excellent writing, communication & interpersonal skills req. Competitive salaries & generous benefit package. Please submit cover letter & resume to: Gabrielle Kreisler, Esq., Dir. of Program & Policy, CCC of New York, 105 E. 22nd St., 7th Fl., NY, NY 10010.©

The Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies seeks a director of high visibility start-up employment project for the mental health sector. The project will help to focus community based providers on the importance of employment as an integral component of treatment -- through training, information dissemination, research and job development.

Must have significant management and supervisory experience. Capable of developing and directing start-up enterprise. Superb interpersonal skills essential. Responsible for staff of educators, researchers and job developers.

Experience with vocational and employment opportunities for disabled populations, including mentally ill people, a plus. Salary commensurate with experience. Consumer applicants encouraged to apply. **The Coalition** is an equal opportunity employer. Send resumes to Search Committee, **The Coalition**, 90 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004.©

Upcoming Events

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| July 3 | Coalition closed in honor of Independence Day |
| July 4 | Coalition closed in honor of Independence Day |
| July 25 | Special Executive Committee at CVMHA |