



Briefs Coalition

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

Federal parity update

Parity legislation is gaining momentum in both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN) along with 11 other colleagues of both parties have introduced the Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2001. This bill provides for full parity for all mental health conditions as listed in the DSM IV by prohibiting service or dollar limits for mental health where none exist for physical health. Furthermore, this bill also shrinks the small business exemption from 50 to 25 employees. As with the last federal parity legislation passed in 1996, insurance companies that experience cost increases of more than 1% are exempt from the parity requirement. Effectively, this legislation would close the loophole in the 1996 federal parity legislation.

In the House of Representatives, Marge Roukema (R-NJ) introduced the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Parity Amendments of 2001. These amendments would eliminate nearly any and all discrepancies in service between physical and mental health, including substance abuse disorders which are not included in the Senate's parity bill. The bill has 102 co-sponsors as of April 18, 2001. ☞

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act update

President Bush announced last week that effective April 13, 2001, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) would take effect. This sweeping law drives the development of electronic data interchange (EDI) for specified administrative and financial healthcare

transactions as well as establishing standards for privacy and security. A comprehensive summary of the act as it pertains to behavioral healthcare will be sent to our membership in addition to being posted on our website.

The summary was prepared by Robert Belfort, Esq., of Kalki-

nes, Arky, Zall & Bernstein, LLP, whose presentation this past February to The Coalition membership on the HIPAA regulations was enthusiastically received.

Be sure to visit The Coalition web site, www.cvmha.org, where the summary can be downloaded at your convenience. ☞

Summer could be long and hot...

No budget, and no MH deal

With the budgetary deadline of April 1 quickly fading into memory, the Governor's office and the Legislature are still working to resolve budget discrepancies. Among the panoply of issues left to resolve are the amount of money the state anticipates collecting ("avails"), as well as outstanding differences on the mental health budget.

In the beginning, the Senate, the Assembly and the Governor's office were literally billions of dollars apart in anticipated revenue; however, they have begun to move closer together in recent weeks. The Governor's office, for example, has now revealed that its original surplus projection was \$1.3 billion short. This re-evaluation would go a long ways towards eliminating the differences between the Assembly's projection of \$85.9 billion and the Governor's \$83.7 billion.

Meanwhile the three parties still have a long ways to go to bridge the gap between proposals for mental health. While the Assembly and the Senate have opened the door to discussing the closure of Hutchings and Middletown, they have not rushed to endorse them. Nonetheless, it is reassuring to know that all three parties are committed to the COLA and the Medicaid fee increase.

Many providers are beginning to get worried, though. Without a budget, the state cannot sign contracts which means providers cannot sign contracts or receive service dollars. Although the state has ponied up and paid its due in years past, providers have had to float millions of dollars to meet payroll at high interest rates. While the state eventually pays the back service costs, this doesn't include interest. The longer the budget session goes on, the more problematic this gets for providers.

That could make for a very long, hot summer. ☞

Coalition Member Honored for Leadership

The Association for Rehabilitative Case Management and Housing was recently singled out by Eli Lilly and Co. and the National Managed Health Care Congress (NMHCC) for leadership in consumer and provider services and was given an award at the National

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SSI Updates Introduced

"It's time to bring the SSI program into the 21st Century," said Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin who introduced a bill on February 27, 2001 that provides increases to SSI income exclusion rules that have not changed for almost 30 years.

The SSI Modernization Act, HR 739, will increase incentives for working, saving and pursuing educational goals for SSI recipients. According to Congressman Cardin, "The SSI program has not kept pace with other social programs in promoting employment and reducing poverty. These are modest changes, but they are critical to encouraging work and savings and to improving educational opportunities for low-income disabled and elderly Americans."

The bill increases the general income exclusion amount from \$20 a month to \$40 a month and indexes the amount to inflation. It increases the earned income exclusion from \$65 a month to \$130 a month, also with inflation indexing. These exclusions affect the reduction of an individual's SSI check due to earnings. Currently, Social Security takes one dollar for every two dollars earned from the monthly gross earnings after the \$20 unearned income exclusion and \$65 earned income exclusion. The bill also increases resource limits, allowing SSI recipients to save resources up to \$3000 instead of \$2000 for individuals, and up to \$4,500 for couples.

The SSI Modernization Act offers further incentives for SSI recipients who are pursuing educational goals. For individuals between the ages of 18-21 and enrolled in secondary education, the

bill delays the SSI redetermination and excludes the entire amount of any education grants from the resource determination for nine months.

Stay tuned for further details.

Work Incentive Resources

The Social Security Administration has recently released an updated list of the SSA Work Incentive Liaisons (WIL) for New York and New Jersey. One designated liaison per SSA office has been trained as a specialist in work incentive provisions. They are also available to provide training to your organization. To request a list or if you have a question about the WILs, please call SSA at (212) 264-4009.

The Social Security Administration has created two special units to handle Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS). The PASS program allows SSA to exclude income and resources for a disabled individual provided the individual needs the income/resources to fulfill a work goal to become gainfully employed. The PASS unit number for New York City and New Jersey is 1-800-551-9583 and 1-800-510-5680 for upstate NY.

As a reminder, Cornell University's Program on Employment & Disability (PED), has a website that is an on-line resource to assist SSI recipients in understanding and using the PASS program. Sponsored by the NYS Education Department's VESID, this website offers four informative features. The program has a PASS learning guide, a calculator to understand the impact of earnings on an SSI check, a resource feature that links individuals to resource people and agencies nationwide who can help with PASS, and an on-line application that can be saved to a disk or saved on-line with a password for up to a month. Visit the site at: <http://passonline.org> or <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/pass>.

Federal budget alert

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law is asking concerned citizens to contact their congresspeople to request increases to the mental health funding proposed by President Bush. The administration's budget proposal reduces funding for mental health services in a number of important programs, including the discretionary-grant fund in the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). Other critical programs are frozen at last year's level. Some newly authorized CMHS programs are defunded completely. Details of the cuts are available at www.bazelon.org/4S01alert.html. The Bush administration's first budget proposal is online at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/.

Coalition members are urged to contact their congresspeople to urge them to support increases to programs that fund mental health services, especially the PATH program, mental health block grant and children's mental health services. To learn more about how to contact your representatives in congress, visit www.nymentalhealth.org.

The Association

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Conference of NMHCC in Atlanta, GA.

The Association (formerly ARMI) is a 28 year-old agency that provides housing and supportive services to adults with psychiatric disorders at four program centers in Manhattan and the Bronx. Through persistent documentation of a period of years they have demonstrated high consumer satisfaction and low rates of hospitalization. Congratulations!

	<p>Tell the world!</p> <p>Order your lapel button from The Coalition Web site today!</p> <p>www.cvmha.org</p>
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Coalition Briefs

— Help Wanted —

Venture House, an innovative psychiatric rehabilitation program based on the well-known "**Fountain House**" clubhouse model, seeks a highly motivated, energetic, creative individual to become part of our team. As a generalist staff worker in our community you would provide assistance to people with mental illness in regard to entitlements, advocacy for needed services, reporting to State and City agencies, management of transitional employment placements, job coaching and work with members of Venture House on unit, agency and program tasks.

As a clubhouse, **Venture House** members and staff work in partnership to run the program. The clubhouse is work oriented and employment focused. Staff needs to be flexible and believe in recovery. BA preferred.

Venture House provides health and pension benefits. The salary for this position is low to mid-twenties. Venture House is open 7 days a week and staff rotate evening and weekend hours.

Please send your resume to Ray Schwartz by May 18, 2001. Resumes can be faxed to 718-658-7899 or mailed to **Venture House**, 150-10 Hillside Ave., Jamaica, NY 11432.✉

Upcoming Events

5/11	All Day	Picnic for Parity (Bryant Park)
5/14	3:00 pm	MICA Committee Meeting
5/17	9:30 am	Government Relations Committee Meeting
5/18	9:00 am	Conference on Supported Housing with MFY-Legal Services (at the law firm of Simpson Thatcher and Bartlett)

Save the Date

**Tuesday June 5, 2001
from 5-8 pm**

**The Coalition
of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies
Celebrates the 17th Annual
Mental Health Awards at
Pfizer World Headquarters**

**For tickets and information
call Judeth Podell at
(212) 742-1600 x104.**

The mission of **Fordham-Tremont Community Mental Health Center** is to provide mental health services to individuals with documented mental illness and to ensure their access to a comprehensive and integrated network of quality behavioral health services. To accomplish our mission, we are seeking qualified, committed mental health professionals and support staff.

Psychiatrist: NYS licensed; B/E, or B/C

Clinicians—Adult Services; Children, Adolescent, and Family Services; Partial Hospitalization: NYS CSW or Licensed PhD/PsyD. Clinical experience in a mental health setting. Ability to provide a full range of services including individual, group and/or family treatment for the program target population. Ability to work with monolingual Spanish speaking individuals preferred.

Psychologist—Partial Hospitalization: NYS licensed PhD/PsyD. Perform psychological evaluations, review psychological reports, provide short-term treatment.

Educational Specialist—Partial Hospitalization: NYS Teacher's License

Activities Therapist—Partial Hospitalization: MA/MS in recreation, art, music, or dance therapy. Experience in a psychiatric/mental health setting; minimum of two activity skills; knowledge of crisis intervention skills and ADL development. Bilingual English/Spanish desirable.

Case Manager—Forensic Link: BA/BS social service/mental health field; experience with forensic population; fluent spoken Spanish preferred.

Unit Registrar—Partial Hospitalization: HS Diploma or GED. Experience in medical/mental health setting preferred; fluent spoken Spanish required.

Contact: Department of Human Resources, **Fordham-Tremont Community Mental Health Center**, 2021 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10453. www.fordhamtremont.org Fax: (718) 466-2115.✉