



THE BELL

The newsletter of the National Mental Health Association ■ Fall 2002

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NMHA **State Advocacy Update**

See center insert for updates on key issues that affect state advocates, consumers and the mental health community-at-large, including:

- Advocates Survive Significant Challenges This Session
- **Waiver Watch:** Growing Number of States Seek to Expand Services Through HIFA, 1115 Waivers
- Healthcare Reform Advocacy Trainings

Americans Support Mental Health Parity, Survey Shows

Time for Action Is Now, Says Faenza

More than three-fourths of Americans believe that health insurance companies should provide equal coverage for mental health care and other types of medical care, according to poll results NMHA released Oct. 2.

Eighty-three percent of those surveyed said it's unfair to require policy holders to pay significantly more in out-of-pocket expenses for such care than they do for other types of health care services. And 79 percent of respondents of all age groups throughout the country said they would support the passage of parity legislation even if their health insurance premiums increased by \$1 per month. The Congressional Budget Office recently projected that enactment of parity legislation would increase premiums by less than 1 percent.

“The writing's on the wall, here. The American public believes insurance discrimination is unfair and supports

mental health parity. The President asked Congress to pass legislation this year and a majority of Congress supports it,” declared NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza. “It's time for Congress to pass mental health parity legislation.”

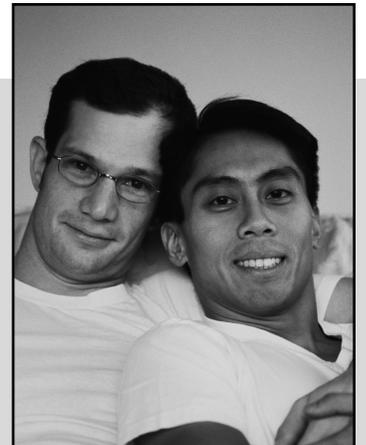
When survey participants were asked how much coverage they believed health insurance companies should provide for mental illnesses, 64 percent said they should provide coverage equal to that provided for physical illnesses and injuries; 18 percent said insurance companies should provide more extensive coverage. Only 10 percent said less coverage should be provided for mental illnesses than for physical illnesses and injuries.

The telephone survey, conducted in late September by Opinion Research

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NMHA of Georgia Fosters Support for Atlanta's Gay Community

Learn how the NMHA of Georgia designed an effective program to reach out to Atlanta's gay and lesbian communities. See “Lessons Learned” on page 4.



From the President

The one-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks reminded us vividly of the losses we suffered and of our increased anxiety since the tragedy. This unprecedented disaster, the subsequent anthrax threat, and the ongoing terrorist threat prolong millions of Americans' fear and anxiety. And, random shootings created fear and alarm in and around the nation's capital.

The mental health community has a critical role to play in helping communities cope. Yet, resources for mental health services are woefully inadequate. Many states are proposing cuts in mental health budgets and Medicaid programs. Health insurance plans are discriminating against people with mental health service needs.

The need for comprehensive mental health insurance parity has never been greater. But, despite expressions of support from President Bush and Congress, we haven't won the fight for parity. The House has adjourned until after the Nov. 5 elections; then it will return for a lame duck session, which will be our last chance to win parity before Congress adjourns for the year.

Please, stress to legislators the importance of passing mental health parity, which a great majority of their constituents favor. Emphasize the consequences of untreated mental illness: needless suffering, unemployment, poor school performance, lost productivity and additional health problems. We must convince Congress not to tolerate insurance discrimination against millions of Americans who need care—especially during these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Michael M. Faenza
President and CEO



NMHA and Lifetime Partner on Teen Suicide Prevention

A young person between the ages of 15 and 24 commits suicide every 100 minutes, according to the American Psychiatric Association. To draw attention to this fact and encourage suicide prevention in communities across the country, NMHA teamed up with the Lifetime Television for Women cable network to launch an educational campaign around *The Pact*, a Lifetime original movie that deals with suicide.

To premiere Nov. 4, *The Pact* portrays two families' reactions to a young woman's decision to follow through with a suicide pact she made with her boyfriend. NMHA and Lifetime have created an educational kit that will help explain to the public how to spot and respond to signs of depression and suicidal thoughts or behavior in young people.

Lifetime will distribute to schools nationwide more than 40,000 of these kits, which contain fact sheets, statistics, resources and an activity poster that features in-class suicide education activities. Schools will also receive copies of the movie viewer's guide that feature an interview with 16-year-old Brandon Fletcher, who attempted suicide when he was in the sixth grade. Fletcher won NMHA's 2001 Youth Medal of Excellence in Public Education award for speaking out about his mental illness and recovery.

NMHA has developed for MHAs a how-to sheet that includes tips for working with local cable providers to publicize the movie and promote suicide education in their communities. MHAs will receive 25 copies of the movie viewer's guide, a copy of the educational kit and a copy of the how-to sheet.

For more information, contact Carla Brock, NMHA's senior director of Marketing, at 703-797-2588. 

Americans Favor Parity, NMHA Survey Shows

continued from front page

Corporation, elicited responses from 1,049 adults, living in private households throughout the United States. Each respondent's age, sex, geographic region and race were factored in to ensure the participant sample accurately represents the American population as a whole. The margin of error was plus or minus 2 percent to 3 percent.

The Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act, H.R. 4066, has 243 congressional supporters and two-thirds of the Senate supports the companion bill. The number of national organizations that endorse the legislation has reached 239, but House leaders have yet to act on it.

"We're running out of time," Faenza said. "The President pledged to work with the Speaker and others to pass legislation this year to provide full mental health parity. We need the President to call for it to be passed before Congress adjourns and to avoid substitute legislation that falls short of the protections NMHA-backed legislation provides."

For more information about the survey and mental health parity, and to read personal stories from people who are suffering because they lack the insurance coverage they need, visit the NMHA Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>. 

A Family's Struggle For Understanding And Support

by Robin Kitchell

Ask any loving, devoted parents what they would be willing to do for their children and they'll undoubtedly answer, "What wouldn't I do for my kids?"

But those of us whose relatives have mental illnesses know that one of the biggest obstacles to providing the support and attention they need are health insurance policies that provide far less coverage for mental health care than they do for the treatment of physical illnesses and injuries.

My husband, John, and I discovered this early on when our son, J.W., began to exhibit signs of mental illness, characterized by paranoia and thoughts of suicide, at the unusually early age of 5. We were lucky enough, while living in Boston, to have our son diagnosed accurately with bipolar disorder, a condition that is rarely attributed to young children. Little did we know that our quest for adequate mental health services would turn into a difficult and painful odyssey.

When we had exhausted all of the mental health coverage under my husband's employer-provided insurance policy, John felt compelled to leave his job—and his 12-year relationship with that company—to find one that would provide the coverage J.W. needed. I had already been forced to leave my job so that I could spend more time caring for our son. Because we couldn't access the amount of professional support J.W. needed, his condition worsened, causing him to get in trouble at school and elsewhere.

So seven years ago we left Boston for Tennessee, where John had found a job that provided the increased medical coverage we needed, although we struggled with \$50,000 in medical bills. It was a major and difficult adjustment for all of us, but one that I know we were right to make. As a result, my son recently celebrated a very happy and hopeful 17th birthday. I began an advocacy program for at-risk underprivileged children and their families, a rewarding role that gives me more time to give my son the attention he needs.



Robin Kitchell's (left) son was one of five teenagers and young adults to be recognized by NMHA with its Youth Medal of Excellence in Public Education. Her son, J.W. (right), receives his award from NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza at NMHA's 2002 Annual Conference in June.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning friends and acquaintances who don't understand the challenges involved often blame people with mental illnesses, or their families, for the difficulties they face. People still tell me that if I'd just prayed more for J.W., or had spanked him more often when he was young, all would be well.

My parents and in-laws are uncomfortable even discussing it much less providing overt support. And although I insist on talking openly about our challenges, many people question the appropriateness of doing so. My and John's early lack of understanding about mental illness and what to do about it also led to our divorce when J.W. was four years old. I became so immersed in seeking help for J.W. that my husband felt left out and frustrated that J.W.'s problems couldn't be easily or quickly fixed. But when J.W. became seriously ill, the crisis was a revelation for John, leading us to reunite, and he has worked as hard as I have ever since to understand J.W.'s challenges.

My husband and I have learned not to decide for J.W. what he needs; we consult him before making decisions about what affects him and about how we go about helping him reach his goals. But families such as ours need to be treated honestly and respectfully by medical health practitioners. And, above all, we need adequate insurance coverage to ensure that people with mental illness receive the information and assistance they need. ■

Each year, as a part of Childhood Depression Awareness Day, NMHA recognizes outstanding teenagers and young adults who have spoken out about mental health issues with its Youth Medals of Excellence in Public Education. Medal winners and their families are honored during NMHA's annual conference.

For more information on Childhood Depression Awareness Day, visit <http://www.nmha.org/children/green/index.cfm>.

NMHA of Georgia Helps Foster Groundswell Of Support for Atlanta's Gay Community

“To make a difference in a community, you have to become a part of it to get the people you serve to show you the way,” said Kristine Medea, M.A., A.B.S., L.P.C., the NMHA of Georgia's (NMHAG) director of clinical education. When she arrived in Atlanta three years ago, she did just that, and soon learned that NMHAG lacked a program to support the city's burgeoning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community.

Medea set out to diversify the association's efforts in this area, first by providing staff with cultural sensitivity training, then by providing outreach to increase the association's visibility in this underserved community.

“One of the easiest and most effective ways to do this is to participate in Atlanta's annual Gay Pride Festival,” she said. The 2002 celebration in June drew 300,000 attendees. “Many people come to the booth for information and others call our office for weeks afterward. Some want to tell us how hard it's been for them to find help,” she said, pointing to the shortage of mental health professionals who are “culturally sensitive and competent when it comes to LGBT issues.”

People from the gay community tend to be high users of counseling services or peer support groups, Medea explained, “to deal with the challenges they face in ‘coming out’ and in dealing with the effect it can have on their

relationships. But many are reluctant to seek mental health treatment for conditions like depression or anxiety disorders.” Some LGBT consumers are afraid therapists will try to link their mental health issues directly to their sexual orientation, she added.

“Homosexuality was categorized as a mental illness until 1973, and the diagnosis of gender identity disorder is still on the books.”

This year's festival also marked the first time the Rainbow Brigade, a group of local LGBT representatives, ran the booth and helped organize the association's festival activities. This 22-member “brigade” also meets monthly to help the NMHAG set goals and shape programs.

“Local influence can never be underestimated,” Medea said. “Grassroots work will mobilize a community faster when the leadership comes from 'our own,' and in the South that is very important.” Local funding support is equally vital; NMHAG receives financial support from the Metro Atlanta United Way.

Brigade members suggested that NMHAG focus on depression and suicide, and youth issues such as bullying and harassment. NMHAG now participates in school visits organized by Enlight Atlanta, which educates faculty members, counselors and nurses about how to prevent and deal with student bullying and harassment. An NMHAG staff member discusses youth depression and suicide during these visits, and ways teachers can support young LGBTs and other alienated students. LGBT kids often participate in the program to provide teachers with a first-hand glimpse of their lives. “When kids describe the pressure and harassment they endure from classmates, it really hits home,” Medea said.

She readily acknowledges that not all schools are receptive to such programs. “But, if the school principal or faculty members are resistant, it often helps to approach a school counselor or nurse. They deal with these issues and their consequences most often,” she noted.

Teachers can and do reach out in subtle ways. For example, by having a gay magazine or a rainbow sticker in a classroom, Medea pointed out, “teachers can send a signal to LGBT students that they are safe and may be able to look to these teachers for support.” She also noted that more teachers are adopting the “Safe Sticker Program.”

Medea wants to expand her outreach efforts to children in systems of care, the juvenile justice system and group homes, drawing on community expertise and leveraging local resources to expand the NMHA of Georgia's outreach. “It's so important to get to know the community you're serving,” Medea said, “and to find out from them what their needs and priorities are.” 

NMHA in Georgia

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NMHA Annual Conference Focuses on Roads to Recovery



National People of Color Consumer/Survivor Network cofounder Jacki McKinney.

Recovery is possible, especially among consumers who play an active role in planning their treatment. This message emerged as a recurring theme delivered by speaker after speaker during NMHA’s 2002 Annual Conference, held June 5-8 in Washington, D.C. The event attracted legislators, advocates, consumers and prominent mental health experts to discuss this year's theme, “Prevention, Resilience and Recovery,” in a variety of workshops and other events.

Jacki McKinney, cofounder of the National People of Color Consumer/Survivor Network, put it simply: “Nothing about us, without us.”

Mark Ragins, M.D., of the Village Integrated Services Agency in Los Angeles, which won this year's NMHA Innovation in Programming Award, discussed his experiences assisting consumers in recovery. “I learned that when I help consumers to identify their career goals, they're far more willing to do whatever it takes to meet them, than if the goal is simply to ‘get better,’” he said.

William Anthony, Ph.D., executive director for the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University, agreed, saying, “Where are the data that show people with mental illnesses have to work in low-end jobs or shouldn't return to college?”

Focusing on consumers’ goals as a key component of recovery surfaced as a theme throughout the meeting. “Hope is why we do what we do,” said this year's NMHA Clifford W. Beers Award winners Dan Fisher, M.D., Ph.D., and Laurie Ahern, cofounders of the National Empowerment Center, Inc.

Ronald Kessler, Ph.D., professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School, delivered some eye-opening statistics about treatment: “Up to 90 percent of the population receive treatment for serious depression, but only 30 percent do so within the first year.”

William Beardslee, M.D., psychiatrist-in-chief at Children's Hospital in Boston, explained that his team focuses on early diagnosis and response, especially among at-risk children. “When we provide interventions for such kids ... we've been able to cut the development of mental illness in half,” said Beardslee, who just released his new book, *Out of the Darkened Room: Protecting the Children and Strengthening the Family When a Parent Is Depressed*.

Other speakers also called for increased advocacy on behalf of children. Children's Defense Fund founder and President Marian Wright Edelman, this year's NMHA Tipper Gore “Remember the Children” Award winner, described as “morally shameful the poor conditions many neglected and underserved children endure in this country.”

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NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza presents the Tipper Gore “Remember the Children” Award to Children’s Defense Fund founder and President Marian Wright Edelman.



Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, (second from right) speaks with (from left) NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza, Anne Michalski of the MHA of Dubuque County (Iowa), NMHA Board Chairman Gary Tauscher.

Harmony for Mental Health Gala Honors Award-Winning Author

More than 500 guests filled the Starlight Roof at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City on May 2 to pay tribute to Andrew Solomon, author of the *The Noonday Demon—An Atlas of Depression*, and to support the “Harmony for Mental Health” Gala co-sponsored by NMHA, the MHA of New York City and the Jed Foundation.

CNN news anchor Paula Zahn hosted the gala, which raised money for the three organizations. Zahn kicked-off the event by saluting New York Yankees General Manager Joe Torre and actress Susan Sarandon for their post-September 11 mental health public education efforts. CBS journalist Mike Wallace presented the Voice of Mental Health Award to Solomon for his work to raise public awareness of mental health issues and fight stigma. Three-time Tony award-winning vocalist Audra McDonald performed after the presentation.



CBS news anchor Mike Wallace (right) presents the Voice of Mental Health Award to author Andrew Solomon.

NMHA will use the event as a launchpad to support the development of a new youth outreach initiative it is developing with the music industry called **mpower: musicians for mental health**. With support from artists and leaders in the music industry, **mpower** is designed to empower America's youth to learn about mental health and substance abuse and when to get help. More information about this evolving project will be available in the near future. For a quick preview of this program, visit <http://www.nmha.org/mpower> or contact Shela Halper at shalper@nmha.org. 📧

Colleges Must Take Action to Prevent Suicides, NMHA Report Says

College administrators must take action now to safeguard students against suicide, according to a report released in September by NMHA and The Jed Foundation. Administrators can help students by developing programs to screen for depression, and providing off-campus referrals and emergency services.

The report, “Safeguarding Your Students Against Suicide: Expanding the Safety Net,” is a response to former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher’s national suicide prevention strategy. As a follow up to the plan, NMHA and The Jed Foundation convened a panel of leading mental health experts to develop guidelines for campus suicide prevention programs.

The report also includes action plans and checklists to help administrators assess their students’ mental health needs. NMHA and The Jed Foundation sent the reports to more than 3,000 colleges and universities throughout the country in September.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college-age students, with an estimated 1,088 occurring on campuses each year. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other universities have contended with lawsuits related to on-campus suicides and the services these institutions provide to students at risk. 📧

Copies of the report are available from NMHA’s Web site at <http://www.nmha.org/suicide/index.cfm>.

NMHA to Launch the Bell Of Hope Memorial

NMHA will soon introduce a new feature to its Web site: the Bell of Hope Memorial. This specially designated Web page will give families who have lost loved ones an opportunity to honor them through an online tribute and to establish a fund that will support NMHA's and affiliates’ work. It will also allow NMHA to acknowledge the large number of memorial gifts NMHA and MHAs receive from generous supporters. To

encourage support of state and local MHAs, each family that creates a Memorial Fund or a Suicide Prevention Memorial Fund will be encouraged to designate a percentage of their gift to an MHA of their choice.



NMHA Offers Tips on Coping

NMHA responded to the recent violence in the Washington, D.C.-area with coping tips to help ease anxiety surrounding personal safety. As part of NMHA's response, the association has provided technical assistance to its affiliates, many of which are providing mental health services to affected communities.

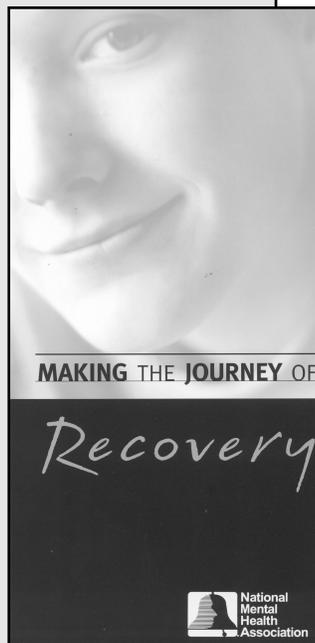
In August, NMHA also posted on its Web site and mailed to its affiliates information and advice designed to help people cope during the Sept. 11 anniversary. The materials offer tips for individuals, parents, teachers and employers.

All the tips are a part of NMHA's "Coping With Disaster" series, which is posted on NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>. 

New Publications From NMHA

NMHA has released several new publications available from NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org> or by calling 800-969-NMHA (6642).

- ***Making the Journey of Recovery*** outlines successful recovery strategies for people with mental health disorders.
- ***Checking Up on Juvenile Justice Facilities*** describes how to arrange juvenile justice facility visits to raise community awareness of the facilities' conditions.
- ***What Does Gay Mean?*** is an anti-bullying guide for parents and other adults on how to explain homosexuality to children and how to teach tolerance.
- ***Ending Homelessness for People With Mental Illnesses and Co-Occurring Disorders*** is a brief guide that explains how to implement supported housing programs and where to find funding sources.
- ***Bipolar Disorder and African Americans*** explores why so many African Americans with this often debilitating disorder go untreated, what the signs and symptoms are, and how to get appropriate care.
- ***Putting Prevention Into Managed Mental Health Care*** explains the importance of prevention to purchasers of healthcare, including corporations and health plans.



Faenza Challenges President's Commission to Encourage Cultural Competency

Last month, NMHA President and CEO Michael Faenza challenged the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health to help end systemic discrimination against people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the public mental health system. "The discrimination and misunderstanding that results from cultural incompetency within delivery systems erects barriers to service," Faenza said. He also provided the commission with a copy of NMHA's "Cultural Competency in Mental Health System" position paper, which includes examples of best practices. Read Faenza's testimony at http://www.nmha.org/federal/Faenza_Tesitmony_to_MHCommission_080802.PDF; NMHA's position papers are available at <http://www.nmha.org/position/index.cfm>. 

NMHA Annual Conference Focuses on Recovery

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Giselle Stolper, executive director of the MHA of New York City, gave an emotional address about MHA responses to the September 11 tragedy. "The destruction of mental health is the primary goal of terrorism," she said, but added that September 11 is "a story of overcoming terrible adversity."

Many attendees also met with their legislators June 6 to discuss parity and other issues, and traveled en masse to Capitol Hill to join thousands of advocates at the "Mental Health Parity Now!" rally. NMHA recognized Rep. Marge Roukema, R-N.J., who spoke at the rally, with its Into the Light Tribute Award at a congressional reception. Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J. and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, were also honored at the meeting with NMHA's Legislator of the Year Awards.

Incoming NMHA Chairman J.R. Elpers, M.D., closed the meeting by acknowledging the field's accomplishments and calling attention to the work that remains to be done: "We must learn to cure mental illness without the loss of precious days, weeks and years of productive meaningful lives." 

NMHA affiliates can view additional photos of NMHA's 2002 Annual Conference on the "affiliate-only" section of NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>.



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The Bell is published by the National Mental Health Association, which works with more than 340 affiliates nationwide to promote mental health, prevent mental disorders and achieve victory over mental illnesses through advocacy, education, research and service.

To join NMHA and receive *The Bell*, visit NMHA's Web site at <http://www.nmha.org> or call 800-969-NMHA (6642).

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