

TESTIMONY OF LEON EVANS
CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY DIRECTORS
TO NACo MEMBER OFFICERS

Good Afternoon, President Stapley, President-Elect Brown, and Honorable Members. My name is Leon Evans. I am the current Chairman of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDDD), one of your NACo affiliates. I am also the Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Health Care Services in Bexar County, Texas, the County's Mental Health Authority.

Our NACBHDDD members represent County based Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Developmental Disability Authorities across our nation.

We all struggle with a population whose illness is so debilitating and their personal health seeking ability is almost non-existent, therefore; treatment seems to be impossible. It also appears that no one is taking responsibility to ensure this care, and consequently; we have our county jails, emergency rooms, and our streets overflowing with very ill persons in inappropriate venues.

We are also criminalizing so many who could and should be treated. The chronic and persistently homeless are persons with severe mental illness who, many times, have co-occurring substance abuse disorders.

Our members are grateful that the leadership of NACo is addressing these health issues that affect the health and safety of all of our communities.

So What Is The Problem?

- We have tens of thousands non-violent mentally ill persons who find themselves in our emergency rooms, jails and prisons that should be treated in our state hospitals and other appropriate community settings.
- A recent Texas study shows that 26% percent of persons in the Texas Criminal Justice System, including jails, prisons, and persons on probation or parole have been treated for mental illness sometime in their lives either in a state hospital and/or community mental health clinics.
- Our county hospitals and emergency rooms are also inappropriately packed with persons who should be treated outside the hospital settings.
- Family, friends, law enforcement, the business community, and tax payers are all burdened with the behaviors of these persons going untreated.
- We should be using tax payer's revenues in effective and efficient ways and for their intended use.

So, What are the Barriers to Overcome

- First, we must find resources, benefits/funding

- A great example of a new resource actualized, was the passage of the new Mental Health Federal Parity Bill which NACo and it's members supported wholeheartedly
- We must also overcome the inefficiencies created by bureaucratic roadblocks that result in siloed funding and over-regulation
- We must eliminate bureaucratic rules/strings that prevent the effective and efficient use of resources
- As we eliminate silos and bureaucratic roadblocks, we must find ways that allows local communities to work with State and Federal entities to be able to braid or blend Federal, State, and local dollars.
- We also must assure the effective and efficient use of the funds and create plans that will drive out waste and duplication while meeting desired outcomes.
- Another barrier is the lack of resources to address the needs for early intervention and treatment available for persons on the road to being hopelessly addicted to alcohol and drugs
- A key obstacle in creating a community plan is the lack of communication and the accountability needed to address this fragile population
- Therefore, it is critical that the right leadership be identified to ensure a workable and sustainable plan—"Who's going to make us work together"
- Any plan that would ensure accountability must identify data needs and a process for analysis; "if it is not measured, it doesn't happen" Edward Demming

We cannot afford to continue to ignore these problems. It is costing us lives and resources.

I worry about persons who are so very ill and have no family or friends to help them navigate our current network of care and benefits. The need for strategies and resources to assure access and needed treatment is critical.

It is a known fact that persons with severe mental illness die 25 years earlier than the general population. The nature of severe mental illness is such that it renders you so dysfunctional that you do not know how to access services then you have an impossible time actually getting treated, even if some type of benefit is available.

Therefore my main concerns about any health care reform initiatives are based on

- Eligibility,
- Access and then
- Actually receiving treatment for those tens of thousands severely mentally ill, especially the homeless.

In summary, I would like to leave you with a critical message. It is that healthcare reform will be successful only if we ensure all who need it, get it. In addition NACBHDDD members have expressed concerns about the following areas which need to be addressed;

- The need for “health navigators”, persons who could facilitate access to treatment through the maze of what we now call our healthcare system

- Need for early identification and intervention for children exhibiting behavioral problems or for children who have been diagnosed with severe mental illness
- The need to provide support for their families
- Members are also concerned about the elderly who are abusing prescription drugs and or alcohol
- Attention to the needs of persons with developmental disabilities and their needs should be examined, especially due to the increase of children with autism
- Thanks to NACo and the Association of State Governors and other advocacy groups, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations had a moratorium placed on essential services such as case management and rehabilitation. These services are critical to the above described population.

There are many challenges before us. An old Chinese proverb states that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now. Let's start.

NACBHDDD would like to thank you for your vision and influence in helping- shape health care reform.