

A STRONG MENTAL HEALTH SAFETY NET REQUIRES ADEQUATE FUNDING

It is news to no one that a mental health crisis exists in this country. Nowhere is that more evident than here in Connecticut. As we joined the state in mourning the loss of life that occurred in Newtown at the hands of a troubled young man, we simultaneously addressed a seemingly never ending quest to maintain state funding to keep the doors of our community based mental health services organization open – how horribly ironic.

As President and CEO of InterCommunity, Inc., I have spent the last 10 years leading a group of dedicated physicians, clinicians and staff in treating thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable adults and children who live with mental health and addiction disorders. The undisputed statistics regarding mental illness are as real as the people who live with these illnesses:

- One in four adults experiences a mental health disorder in a given year.
- Fewer than one-third of adults and one-half of children with a diagnosable mental health disorder receive mental health services of any kind in a given year.
- In Connecticut, over 100,000 adults and 40,000 children live with serious mental health conditions.
- Suicides in Connecticut have reached a 20-year high, with 371 suicides in 2011. Suicide is almost always a result of untreated or under-treated mental illness.

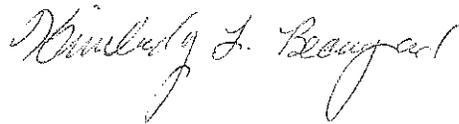
Over the years, Connecticut has systematically moved mental health care away from state-run asylums and institutions. Community based mental health services, like the ones provided by InterCommunity, Inc., prove to better integrate mentally ill people in the community, increasing their chances for rehabilitation and recovery. In 2006, 59% of Connecticut state mental health agency spending was on community mental health services, which falls seriously short of the national average of 70%. Unfortunately, savings derived from the closings of mental hospitals in the mid-1990s were not reinvested in the already struggling community based mental health system, thus limiting access to services for many Connecticut residents. Without proper diagnosis and treatment, people suffering with mental illnesses often become dysfunctional, unemployed, uninsured, or homeless.

We must also consider the costly consequences of untreated mentally ill adults and children who become incarcerated. Lack of timely mental health services for people in crisis has increased the burden on Connecticut's judicial system. In 2008, 3,400 adults with mental illnesses were incarcerated in Connecticut. It costs Connecticut nearly double to both incarcerate and treat an offender with mental illness (\$48,000 per year) versus providing mental health treatment alone (\$25,000 per year).

If Connecticut is not willing or able to support community based mental health providers in a way that allows us to meet the critical need for services, it is very clear that increased incarcerations will occur. It makes obvious fiscal sense to treat people with mental illness before this happens. In human terms, it makes even more sense to take immediate action to better fund mental health programs before further personal tragedy occurs.

Connecticut is failing badly in reaching some of our most vulnerable citizens who suffer with undiagnosed mental illness. If we are to succeed as the mental health safety net that the Governor envisions, we must be funded at a level that allows this to happen. Before adopting a biennial state budget, we urge Connecticut government officials to work directly with community based mental health care providers to better understand the need for services and how they can be better delivered through our organizations. In this regard, I fully support Governor Malloy's proposal to add \$20 million dollars to the mental health budget to establish a new state bond pool to help providers pay for infrastructure. Although we are very appreciative, this needs to be just the beginning for funding to continue to support community based nonprofits so that all of Connecticut's citizens will be safe in our communities.

Thank you,



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InterCommunity, Inc.

InterCommunity, Inc. is a non-profit community organization that provides comprehensive recovery oriented mental health and addiction disorder services to adults, children and families in Connecticut.