



A Nonpartisan Public Policy and Research Office of the Connecticut General Assembly

**Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing 3/6/15**

**Testimony of Julia Evans Starr  
Executive Director, Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging**

State Capitol  
210 Capitol Ave.  
Hartford, CT 06106  
860-240-5200  
www.cga.ct.gov/coa

Julia Evans Starr  
Executive Director

Deb Migneault  
Senior Policy Analyst

Alyssa Norwood  
Project Manager

Christianne Kovel  
Special Projects  
Coordinator

*With 21 volunteer  
board members from  
across the state*

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Julia Evans Starr, and I am the Executive Director for Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging. I thank you for this opportunity to comment on portions of the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

As you know, Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging is the non-partisan, public policy and research office of the General Assembly, devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults.

The Governor's proposed budget eliminates all funding for the Gatekeeper Program (\$718,158 in both years of the biennium). The Gatekeeper Program is an evidenced-based statewide program with staff specially trained in aging and mental health. The program educates community members who are in regular contact with older adults to look for signs that may indicate that an older adult is at risk or is in need of assistance or services. The Gatekeeper helps individuals navigate complex systems and provides key linkages to programs and services to help them thrive in the community.

Data indicate that an estimated 20.4% percent of adults aged 65 and older met criteria for a mental disorder, such as anxiety and depression. Mental health conditions adversely affect one's physical health and ability to function.<sup>1</sup> Untreated depression, for example, negatively affects the outcome of treatment of heart disease and those with heart disease have a higher rate of depression. Mental health and physical health are often inextricably linked.

The Gatekeeper Program can serve as a diversionary program for older adults for avoiding premature and/or unnecessary hospitalizations or institutional placement by helping connect older adults with medical, social and mental health services. As you know, the cost savings for each Medicaid recipient successful diverted from an institutional setting is quite significant as the average yearly cost to the state for a Medicaid recipient in a nursing facility is approximately \$83,000. Data indicate that the average cost of providing services to an individual in the community is 1/3 the cost of a nursing home placement.

*Thank you for opportunity to provide comment today.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Karel, M. J., Gatz, M., Smyer, M. (2012). Aging and mental health in the decade ahead: What psychologists need to know. *American Psychologist*. Vol. 67 (184-198).