



Public-Private Coalition Pledges to Reform Minnesota's Mental Health System

Press Release

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The Minnesota Mental Health Action Group (MMHAG) is taking action to transform Minnesota's mental health system so that adults and children will have better access to mental health care and services.

Building on a wealth of new research and expert recommendations, months of consultations with all parties in the process, and strong partnerships with consumer organizations, the Action Group is releasing a report today which highlights the action steps that are being taken to transform the mental health system.

"The action steps presented today represent real and tangible improvements for Minnesotans seeking mental health care," said MMHAG Co-Chair and Department of Human Services Commissioner Kevin Goodno. "This group is committed to making the bold changes that lead to the customer-centered, quality care system we all agree we need."

Comprised of mental health providers, hospitals, health plans, consumer advocacy organizations and the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Health, the Steering Committee of MMHAG is releasing its first progress report and action steps. MMHAG's action steps mark the beginning of a process which will lead to substantial changes in Minnesota's mental health system.

These action steps are based on the public commitment of the major stakeholders in this system to achieve these changes, and their ability and capacity to make these changes in partnership with their peers. Legislative changes may also be sought to remove barriers and reduce complexity of programs and funding.

"What is both unique and important about this initiative is the partners at the table who have drafted the action steps", said Gary Cunningham, MMHAG Co-Chair and former Board Chair of the Citizens League. "Government alone is not going to solve this public health issue; it has to be a partnership with private organizations, volunteer organizations, and hospitals. We are fortunate to have leadership at the highest levels from these organizations through this partnership."

The action steps delineated in the progress report are as follows:

- Increase the public's awareness of mental health care and provide education and support for screening and earlier intervention.
- Develop a new statewide funding and payment model that is consumer-centered and promotes high quality, efficient care provided at the right time and in the right setting.
- Move to a regional system for publicly funded, community-based services.
- Address workforce shortages.
- Coordinate care and services in the public and private mental health systems.
- Establish outcomes for care.
- Expand opportunities for partnerships between education systems and mental health providers to increase consultation and earlier interventions addressing the continuum of mental health needs for students and their families.
- Correct financing dysfunctions.
- Develop a model mental health benefit set, and promote its adoption by both public and private payers.
- Establish a statewide public-private partnership, where common understandings of mental health system changes are understood and actions initiated.

More than \$1.2 billion is spent each year on mental health services in Minnesota, and there are hundreds of public, private and nonprofit mental health programs, activities and agencies. Despite the invested money and activity, the system is not working the way it should. Patients and their families are dissatisfied because their needs are not being met. The system is fragmented, inefficient, and often ineffective. There is little coordination between public and private services, and between the health care and social service systems.

In forming the Action steps, the MMHAG Steering Committee compiled a comprehensive review of existing mental health and chemical dependency systems, programs, funding and regulations. They also reviewed recommendations and proposals of recent work groups and commissions and analyzed them to identify common themes and shared goals.

Reaching out to all parties involved in or impacted by mental health issues, the Steering Committee created "action teams" to focus on the barriers, strategies, and necessary recommendations on six priority areas. These action teams greatly expanded input and involvement in the process, and were responsible for preparing the preliminary recommendations for the Steering Committee to consider.

“We are excited to be part this effort to create a system that works for children and adults who need mental health services,” said Louise Brown, Director of the Children’s Mental Health Partnership. “No other illness affects so many children so severely.”

The document released today is an initial progress report. Subsequent reports will highlight future progress.

The public release of the action steps will take place on Thursday February 12, at 2:30 p.m. at 1645 Energy Park Drive, in Saint Paul.

Additional information about MMHAG, its Steering Committee members and the action steps are available on the Internet at www.citizensleague.net/mentalhealth