

Mental Health and Substance Abuse: The Issue at Hand

Background

Mental Illness continues to be a matter of concern in the District of Columbia. For example, from 2005-2010, the average number of people suffering from major depressive episodes within Washington, D.C., was higher than the *national* average of adults suffering from the sameⁱ. In the past decade, Washington, D.C., has consistently seen among the highest rates of illicit drug use of any American state or districtⁱⁱ. Per a 2011 report issued by the NSDUH, 12.9% of Washington D.C.'s total population was diagnosed with a substance abuse disorder in 2010ⁱⁱⁱ. Per a 2009 SAMHSA report approximately 10.3% of adolescents within the District of Columbia had engaged in illicit drug use over a one month period, and 3.1% of area youth were in serious need of treatment for substance abuse which they did not receive^{iv}. During the 2012 Fiscal year approximately 35,000 residents of the District of Columbia were treated for mental health or substance abuse disorders. The Washington, D.C., Department of Mental Health estimated that up to 50% of these patients were simultaneously receiving treatment for mental health *and* substance abuse related issues during this period^v.

To this day there is a stigma surrounding mental illness which may prevent those most in need of aid from seeking the treatment that is critical to their health. A range of factors—from fear of losing medical insurance to concerns about judgment and discrimination at work or school—can easily prevent an individual from reaching out^{vi}. The National Alliance on Mental Illness found that when left unaddressed, mental illness may put an individual at higher risk for the development of chronic illnesses, or lead them down a path towards unemployment, hospitalization, incarceration, or suicide^{vii}. As long as a negative stigma continues to cloud the national dialogue on mental health, a number of individuals will go without critical treatments, subjecting themselves to unnecessary risks.

Funding

Federal Funding for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment

The District of Columbia's Department of Mental Health currently receives direct financial aid from the Federal Government in the form of Federal Grant Funds and Federal Medicare Payments. It is projected that in the 2014 Fiscal Year there will be a 12% drop in funding received by the Department of Behavioral Health from the latter of these two sources^{viii}. In 2012 the National Institute on Drug Abuse estimated that the nation spends \$600 billion annually on issues related to substance abuse. It also noted that this figure could be significantly reduced through smart investments in effective substance abuse treatment programs and services^{ix}.

Budgeting for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment within the District

As of January of 2013, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA—previously a unit operating within the Department of Health) were merged to form the Department of Behavioral Health^x. The proposed FY 2014 Budget looks to allot 240.5 million to the newly established Department of Behavioral Health—continuing with funding previously offered to the Department of Mental Health and drawing around 39.4 million from the Department of Health’s 2013 funding to ensure that critical community services and programs are maintained^{xi}.

For more information on Washington, D.C.’s proposed FY 2014 Budget as it relates to the Department of Behavioral Health and each of its operating divisions please follow the link below^{xii}.

Call to Action

There has been an increased focus on the quality of care DBH consumers receive. We encourage DBH to continue to work towards this goal by: implementing mechanisms to improve training of Community Service Workers; adopt new indicators for “Fidelity reports” that measure not only process, but outcomes; and create a system that holds providers accountable and promotes high quality service.

For a comprehensive list of community based support services, please visit the District of Columbia’s home site for the Department of Mental Health at: <http://dmh.dc.gov/node/119532>

ⁱ United States. Department of Health and Human Services. *NSDUH Report, Metro Brief: Substance Use and Mental Disorders in Washington-Arlington-Alexandria MSA*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012. Web. <<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUHMetroBriefReports/index.aspx>>.

ⁱⁱ United States. Department of Health and Human Services. *States in Brief: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues At-A-Glance, District of Columbia*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2008. Web. <<http://samhsa.gov/data/StatesnMetro.aspx?state=DC>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *NSDUH Report*

^{iv} United States. Department of Health and Human Services. *Adolescent Behavioral Health in Brief: District of Columbia*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2009. Web. <<http://samhsa.gov/data/StatesnMetro.aspx?state=DC>>.

^v Baron, Stephen T. "Testimony of the Director of the Department of Health." FY 2014 Budget Hearing. Council of the District of Columbia Committee on Health. Washington, D.C. 18 Apr 2013. <<http://dmh.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmh/publication/attachments/FY%2014%20Budget%20Request%20Testimony.pdf>>.

^{vi} Mayo Clinic Staff. “Mental Health: Overcoming the Stigma of Mental Illness,” *Mental Illness*. Web. May 26, 2011. <<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mental-health/MH00076>>.

^{vii} National Alliance on Mental Illness. “Mental Illness: Facts and Numbers,” *Mental Illnesses*. Web. 2013. <http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness>.

^{viii} District of Columbia. Department on Mental Health. “Department of Behavioral Health,” *FY 2014 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan*. Web. Posted April 30, 2013. <<http://dmh.dc.gov/node/496912>>.

^{ix} United States. Department of Health and Human Services. *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research Based Guide, Third Edition*. National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2012. Web. <<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment>>.

^x “Department of Behavioral Health Establishment Planning Committee,” *Department of Mental Health*. Web. Posted 2013. <<http://dmh.dc.gov/page/department-behavioral-health-establishment-planning-committee>>.

^{xi} “Department of Behavioral Health”

^{xii} “Department of Behavioral Health”