

MACMHB Guest Column April 2010

The public mental health system in Michigan provides specialized health care and a safety net to many persons throughout Michigan. It not only serves persons on Medicaid but individuals who have no insurance or are underinsured. Proposed cuts to both Medicaid and General Fund, which supports non-Medicaid individuals, will certainly jeopardize this safety net at a time when our communities need it the most.

The 2010 budget cut \$40 million in General Fund statewide. Continued budget reductions of this magnitude, would significantly affect the way we are able to provide services and to whom across our state. While cuts may seem to be the easy solution for our elected officials, these cuts will only cause individuals to seek higher cost services through emergency rooms, inpatient hospitalization, child protection and jails. Clearly this results in an unnecessary toll on the lives of our most vulnerable citizens and their families.

The current economic crisis has led to a dramatic increase in the need for public mental health services. Community Mental Health agencies across the state are reporting 15 to 20 percent increases in requests for services.

The State of Michigan has a constitutional obligation to provide adequate and effective services for Michigan's citizens with disabilities as well as an obligation to balance its budget. The Michigan Mental Health Code requires Community Mental Health agencies to serve individuals with a severe mental illness, developmental disability or substance use disorder regardless of their ability to pay. General Fund dollars are used to serve the immediate needs of the uninsured and link them to benefits including community resources and Medicaid. Those funds are already, grossly inadequate and their effectiveness would be severely damaged with the continued budget cuts.

Despite the impact cuts in the 2009 and 2010 budgets have had, mental health services are on the chopping block again in the 2011 budget. In March, the Senate DCH Appropriations Subcommittee voted to cut \$54 million in non-Medicaid dollars from the community mental health line in the budget despite the impact it will have on the mental health community. As Michigan residents in all counties deal with economic woes, the availability of mental health services is as important as ever.

Legislators need to understand that cutting funding for mental health services doesn't mean that individuals in need will just go away. We need to fight for mental health funding in Michigan and educate our lawmakers on why it's needed. Please take the time to call your state legislator and tell them that mental health funding in Michigan is essential. Without mental health funding, vital programs and services currently offered will have to be cut, leaving individuals in need of treatment with no where else to go. Balancing the budget on the backs of our state's most vulnerable population can not be the answer. There has to be another way. To find your local legislator visit michiganlegislature.org today.