

AGENDA FOR FAIRNESS – 2008-2009
ADOPTED OCTOBER 30, 2008

The California Coalition for Mental Health has identified twelve lasting public policy priorities that serve to guide the Coalition's energies throughout the year. These planks of our Agenda for Fairness are rooted in our over-arching commitment to just treatment and decent care for all Californians with mental illness.

RIGHT TO TREATMENT: Every person living in California should have access to mental health care. The California Coalition for Mental Health believes no one with mental illness should be denied treatment in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting, in the community.

FUNDING: In California less than half of those suffering from serious mental illnesses and serious emotional disturbances receive any care. The human suffering of persons with mental illness and their families when they cannot find or afford care is great; the cost to society is staggering. The combination of underfunding of public mental health systems and discrimination against adults with serious mental illnesses and children with serious emotional disturbances in most private insurance has created this lack of care.

THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT: The Mental Health Services Act was passed by voters in 2004 and is unfolding services in California. The effects of this additional funding must be monitored and care must be exercised so that the base funding for mental health services is both protected and includes adequate growth. The California Coalition for Mental Health is dedicated to full, fair, and adequate funding of the public mental health system.

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION: The California Coalition for Mental Health advocates for a mental health system in which mental illnesses are detected early in their onset and appropriate care is provided at that time in the most effective setting. We believe that through the investment in prevention and early intervention care, and the opportunities for better community care through the Mental Health Services Act, this will reduce the need for intensive community services and supports.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION: People living with mental illnesses are entitled to full equal protection under the law. The California Coalition for Mental Health vigorously opposes discrimination against people living with mental illnesses in employment, housing, respite care, education and all other areas of public life.

HUMAN RESOURCES: The increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in California's population has resulted in a shortage of needed mental health professionals. There is also an ever-increasing shortage of trained mental health professionals especially in the public mental health system. The California Coalition supports the development of a comprehensive Human Resources Action Plan that includes a competitive salary & benefits structure for professionals in the mental health system and funding for the creation of programs for the educational development of ethnic minority and bilingual/bicultural mental health professionals. The California Coalition also supports the creation of programs to offer stipends, mentoring incentives and other support to increase the supply of qualified mental health professionals with special emphasis on students who are in recovery from mental illness and would be willing to work in the public mental health system. Lastly, the California Coalition recognizes the importance of peers as effective service providers and supports stipends, training and accommodations as needed to increase the supply of peer providers in the public mental health system.

EMPLOYMENT: Everyone has the right to find and succeed in employment and be fully integrated into their community. We are dedicated to ensuring that those individuals who have mental illness are allowed to succeed commensurate with their own individual skills and abilities.

EDUCATION: Children with a mental illness have the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive setting able to meet their needs. Their education should include the same academic standards as their peers with appropriate support and accommodations for their mental health condition.

HOUSING: We believe that safe, clean, and affordable housing should be available for individuals and families living with mental illness. People with mental illness must have a voice regarding where and with whom they live. We encourage recovery oriented communities and integration into the rich and varied communities of California. While people suffering from severe mental illness represent less than 5% of the population, they represent 20% to 40% of the homeless. The California Coalition for Mental Health supports increased funding for supportive housing and opportunities for all forms of housing assistance for people suffering from severe mental illnesses, and opposes any legislation that would weaken Federal Fair Housing Act Protection.

Cost of Living increases for SSI/SSP (State Supplemental Payments) benefits were withheld in the early '90s. With the rapid rise in housing costs they aren't adequate to pay for housing costs and housing facilities have closed.

The Coalition supports increases in SSI/SSP payments sufficient to assure housing opportunities throughout the state.

INCARCERATION: Many people suffering from mental illness are incarcerated in jails, prisons, juvenile justice facilities due to the lack of appropriate and adequate treatment. Moreover, there has been a history of mistreatment of prisoners with mental illness. The California Coalition for Mental Health supports efforts to reduce incarceration of people with mental illness, and assure while they are incarcerated and upon their release that they will receive appropriate treatment and full respect for their medical needs. The Coalition also supports their right to be free from any form of discrimination due to their mental illness.

INSURANCE: The California Coalition for Mental Health is committed to assuring comprehensive flexible mental health coverage at parity and in a continuum with coverage of physical illness. Legislation enacted in 1999 (AB 88) provides insurance coverage for severely emotionally disturbed children, and for adults suffering from any of the most common and serious mental illnesses. The Coalition urges that local monitoring and state oversight is vigilant in assuring that health plans abide by the law. Parity legislation needs to be modified to facilitate interdisciplinary and wrap-around care, and to ensure the same access to and continuity in the medical diagnosis and treatment of mental illness that is provided for other physical illness. Additional legislation is still necessary to extend this to all mental illnesses and to drug and alcohol dependency.

AWARNESS EDUCATION: Mental illness is real and treatable, yet it is not well understood, leading to stigma and reluctance to seek assistance early in the onset of a mental disorder. The Coalition urges that schools, primary care physicians and the general public become educated in recognizing the symptoms of mental illness and the value in promptly seeking care.