

Help Make a Difference

We need your help to let our elected officials know mental healthcare and access are important issues. Without hearing from people who live in their home districts, many lawmakers don't understand the need for better mental healthcare.

If you'd like to make a difference and be involved in our efforts to make more medications and treatments available to people who need them, please contact our office at (916) 557-1166. We'll let you know when you can help out by sending a letter to your elected official. One letter to one lawmaker can make the difference in getting a law passed!



The Story of the Bell

"Cast from shackles which bound them, this bell shall ring out hope for the mentally ill and victory over mental illness." (Inscription on NMHA Bell)



During the early days of mental health treatment, asylums often restrained persons with mental illnesses by iron chains and shackles around their ankles

and wrists. With better understanding and treatments, this cruel practice eventually stopped.

In the early 1950s, the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) issued a call to asylums across the country for their discarded chains and shackles. On April 13, 1953, at the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore, MD, NMHA melted down these inhumane bindings and recast them into a sign of hope: the Mental Health Bell.

Now the symbol of NMHA, the 300-pound Bell serves as a powerful reminder that the invisible chains of misunderstanding and discrimination continue to bind people with mental illnesses. Today, the Mental Health Bell rings out hope for improving mental health and achieving victory over mental illnesses.

Over the years, national mental health leaders and other prominent individuals have rung the Bell to mark the continued progress

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*Mental Health
Association in California*

The Mental Health Association in California: assuring that everyone who needs mental health care has access to the appropriate level of care.



Mission

The mission of the Mental Health Association in California is to provide advocacy, education, information and other assistance necessary to ensure that all people who require mental health services are able to receive the mental health and other services that they need, and are not denied any other benefits, services, rights, or opportunities based on their need for mental health services.

The Mental Health Associations have a mission that transcends that of being a provider, recipient or a family member of recipients of services. As the so-called "glue" that holds the California Coalition for Mental Health together, the Mental Health Association in California must not only have a strong presence in Sacramento, but also must have a strong presence in every community in California.

Major Issues

Health Insurance Coverage: Mental health care, through insurance, must be extended to all citizens and be broad enough to meet virtually all mental health care needs. MHAC must advocate for broad coverage and educate key public and private decision makers about the cost effectiveness of mental health treatment and the societal consequences of excluding it.

Funding of public mental health services: Most of the mental health needs of persons with severe mental illnesses are not met

This means there must be public funding to meet the health care needs of persons with severe mental illness and advocacy to provide for that funding at the local, state and national level.

Stigma, Ignorance, Denial and other factors affecting clients, family members and professionals prevent treatment of an estimated 50% of mental disorders. MHAC must educate parents, teachers, physicians, employers and others so that all mental disorders are recognized.

Research: To develop new medications, treatments and possible cures to mental illnesses is vital to advancing the quality of life for persons suffering from mental disorders. MHAC must support public and private research efforts.

Discrimination (another impact of Stigma) prevents persons with mental illness from obtaining employment and other opportunities in society. MHAC must educate employers to dispel this myth.

Vision of Our Future Organization

To carry out this mission, there must be a strong mental health association in every community. A strong mental health association has a broad base of support and membership including providers, clients, family members, mental health facilities and manufacturers of psychiatric medications and other products.

A strong mental health association in each community should be able to:
Have a solid base of membership that demands additional funding for mental health and strong mental health cover-

age as a constituency group that cannot be ignored in any debate over local, state or federal budget issues and in mandatory health insurance debates. Our associations should be large enough to be able to deliver that critical mass of letters, phone calls, or attendees at meetings necessary for each local, state and federal elected official to see the mental health community as a powerful constituency group that is politically important to its members' future.

Provide staff and materials available to educate citizens about mental illness, about the efficacy of treatment and about the outdated myths that cause stigma and denial of services. These should be comprehensive and ongoing programs that reach schools, employers, labor unions, law enforcement, primary care physicians, parents and other family members. There should be a well coordinated local state and national public education program through the media.

Getting From Here to There

Establish new chapters and gain affiliation of all existing MHAs.

Strengthen membership base of all chapters. Work with associations of providers, families and clients to incorporate MHA membership as part of their memberships by seeing the value of MHA support and its educational efforts (which these groups are not sufficiently broad based to undertake) as vital to their own success.

Please visit our website for additional information about the MHAC at www.mhac.org.