

NJAMHAA Applauds Obama Administration's Commitment to Behavioral Health

The White House recently hosted a National Conference on Mental Health, launching a much-needed initiative to increase awareness of mental illnesses and improve access to services. "Across the country, behavioral healthcare systems have been underfunded for a long time. This shortfall, as well as the lack of insurance coverage, has made it difficult for many to receive services," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA). "Meanwhile, the number of children and adults in need of behavioral health services has continued to grow - most recently due to the natural and manmade disasters and, over a longer period of time, due to the recession and persistent high unemployment rates, let alone any other struggles individuals may experience."

"We are very pleased that President Obama is leading this national initiative to educate all Americans about mental illnesses, eliminate stigma and ultimately ensure access to services for everyone in need. Requiring health insurance companies to cover mental healthcare and addiction treatment services is a critical first step that we applaud President Obama for taking as part of the Affordable Care Act," Dr. Wentz added.

"Mental illnesses, as well as substance use disorders, are real illnesses, just like cancer and diabetes. President Obama made a powerful point when he said we would not accept just a percentage of people with cancer or diabetes receiving treatment, and we should not accept the disparity for individuals with behavioral health disorders," Dr. Wentz said. "With the White House's evident dedication to improving the nation's behavioral healthcare system, I am confident that all Americans can look forward to receiving the help that they or their loved ones may need and, as a result, to enjoying the high quality of life that everyone deserves to have."