

Arizona Tragedy Underscores Need



Arizona Tragedy Underscores Need for Awareness of and Services for Mental Illnesses and Addictions

The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) joins the rest of the behavioral health community and nation in mourning the loss of lives, and hoping for recovery of those wounded during the shooting in Arizona this past weekend. Although no evidence has been reported of the shooter, Jared Loughner, having a mental illness or addiction, this tragedy underscores the need for every American citizen to be aware of the signs and symptoms of mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders; to know of available services that have been proven effective in treating these illnesses and enabling consumers to live healthy productive lives; and to avoid or overcome stigmatizing perceptions about mental illnesses and addictions and those who have either or both of these disorders.

“This situation is a tremendous catastrophe, and we send our best wishes for recovery and our sympathy for losses to Representative Giffords, her colleagues and their families,” said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., CEO of NJAMHAA. “Incidents such as this tragedy potentially highlight the unfortunate prevalence of stigma against individuals who have mental illnesses or substance abuse disorders; the lack of understanding or acceptance of these illnesses; and the persistently limited access to services for the increasing number of children and adults in need.”

State and federal funding for community-based mental healthcare and addiction treatment services have been cut and are at risk of further reductions, despite evidence of the increasing number of individuals in need of these services and of the substantial savings – of both lives and money – that would be achieved by ensuring access to these services.

“NJAMHAA will continue to advocate to state and federal leaders in unrelenting efforts to ensure that community-based mental healthcare and addiction treatment services are consistently and sufficiently funded. Our vision is that every child and adult will promptly receive the highest quality services, and that tragedies such as the recent shooting in Arizona may potentially be prevented.”