



ADVANCING
MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY &
INSPIRING
LEADERSHIP



May 18, 2017

Dear Legislative Leaders:

We are reaching out to you for leadership and support on what we believe to be the premier public health issue of our time. You, no doubt, have seen the statistics: One in four families in the United States have a loved one coping with mental illness. Depression has now surpassed all other conditions as the leading cause of disability across the globe. Every year in this country, about 100,000 young adults experience their first psychotic episode, generally a precursor to schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and other serious mood disorders. Fifty percent of people prone to serious mental illness experience their first symptoms by the age of 14.

Alarming as these statistics are, the fact is, that with appropriate diagnosis and early intervention, serious mental illness can be targeted, treated and managed, much like other serious health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. But the unfortunate truth is that the vast majority of people living with mental illness don't have access to that level of care. And the longer the illness goes untreated, the more likely the individual will veer down a damaging and potentially deadly path, failing to graduate, unable to form relationships, unable to hold a job.

Many of you are working to address the unfortunate outcomes of untreated mental illness in your home districts: The explosion of people experiencing homelessness in your community. The two million people booked into jail each year in nationwide because they committed criminal acts while in the grips of mental illness.

So, if treatment exists, why are so many people struggling? Part of the answer is resources: We continue to press for the coordination and training required to scale up and replicate the best evidence-based treatment practices across the state. We continue to press for integrated systems of care that will involve primary care providers and schools in early detection and intervention.

And just as key: We continue to press for the education and outreach required to bust the stigma that still surrounds mental health. How do we lift the shadow that inexplicably lingers over a diagnosis of mental illness, so people understand there is no shame in seeking help? How do we normalize discussion of brain health in our homes, communities and places of work, so mental illness is not viewed as a moral failing or life sentence?

We need your vision and input on all facets of this battle. And most immediately, we're asking for your help in dispelling the stigma that keeps so many people from accessing the services they need. **On May 22, please proudly don your green ribbons and support the joint Senate-Assembly resolution in support of Mental Health Awareness Month.** And on **May 24, designated Mental Health Matters Day, join us on the East Side of the Capitol at 10 a.m. for a morning of speakers**

and presentations, as we encourage Californians to engage in open and honest conversation about this critical area of public health.

Sincerely,



Maggie Merritt, Executive Director
Steinberg Institute



Kirsten Barlow, Executive Director
County Behavioral Health Directors Association



Don Mordecai, National Leader
Mental Health and Wellness
Kaiser Permanente



Jessica Cruz, Executive Director
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