

The Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association Government Relations Committee Update



MARCH 2016



IMHCA Board members, Licensed Mental Health Counselors, and graduate students from Drake University came together for the 8th annual 'Day on the Hill' event held on March 7th. The event is a joint effort with the Iowa Association of Marriage and Family Therapists and is aimed at bringing awareness to the barriers and concerns expressed by a growing number of mental health professionals in Iowa and the clients they serve.

Not pictured here: IMHCA President, Don Gilbert and several representatives from IAMFT that were also in attendance.

Summary of Public Policy and Mental Health Awareness Efforts

March was a busy month for the Government Relations Team! On Monday, March 7th 2016, the Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association held its 8th annual "Day on the Hill" advocacy event at the Capitol in Des Moines. With increasing interest and concern about the current state of Iowa's mental health delivery system, the event has steadily grown in popularity since its inception during the 2008 Regular Session. This year we welcomed the highest number of attendees to date, consisting of mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and over a dozen students from Drake University's Mental Health Counseling and Rehabilitation Programs. Numbering over twenty, participants gathered for a short briefing by IMHCA and IAMFT state lobbyist, Emily Piper, to review the afternoon agenda and hear the latest legislative update before heading upstairs to meet individually with Senators and Representatives from both sides of the aisle.

Focusing on members of the Senate and House Human Resources Committees, Majority and Minority Leaders, and a small number of legislators from various participant districts, our emphasis this year was placed on educating session leaders from both chambers by summarizing key legislative efforts, communicating individual and collective experiences related to the privatization of Medicaid services in Iowa, and showing appreciation for supported efforts and/or movement on IMHCA monitored legislation.

As is sometimes the case (these things are often difficult to predict), many of our meeting requests were met with disappointment as attempts to successfully navigate around caucuses in both chambers proved difficult. In spite of the unforeseen barriers and unusually quiet Senate and House floors, attendees were able to speak at length with House Representatives David Heaton (R), Beth Wessel-Kroeschell (D), Zach Nunn (R), and John Forbes (D) along with Senate Republican Leader Bill Dix. Each was receptive and willing to listen openly to the group's concerns, and although there were a few spirited disagreements about the handling of Iowa's Medicaid privatization efforts, there seemed to be bi-partisan agreement that a certain level of DHS and IME oversight would be necessary as the state forges ahead with a looming April 1st implementation date.

It was refreshing to see folks come together once again to rally for quality mental health services, higher industry-wide standards, and accountability by our leaders as we face an ever-changing mental health delivery system in Iowa. A special thank you to Emily Piper for her continued efforts on our behalf, fellow IMHCA board members who took time out of their day to join in our efforts, our colleagues at the Iowa Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, the instructors at Drake University for relaying to graduate students the importance of becoming active in local public policy and advocacy efforts, and the providers who were willing to come to the capitol and share their stories in an effort to help make our 2016 Day on the Hill a success! Finally, to the IMHCA members and conference goers whose contributions make our lobbying efforts possible, we could not do this year after year without you.

The Government Relations Committee looks forward to getting your feedback at the IMHCA conference in April! We also encourage you to check out the mental health observance reminders coming up for the month of April!

Respectfully,
Kacey M. Peterson, MS, LMHC
Government Relations Committee Chair
government@imhca.net

Mental Health Awareness Calendar Reminders

March Re-cap:

American National Nutrition Month;
Employee Spirit Month; Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month;
National Sleep Awareness Week® (Mar. 6-13); Brain Awareness Week (Mar 14-20)

April Observances

National Autism Awareness Month; Alcohol Awareness Month;
National Stress Awareness Month; Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) Month;
National Minority Mental Health Month; National Counseling Awareness Month;
World Health Day (Apr. 7)

Sign up now for the 2016 IMHCA Conference! (April 11th and 12th)