

IMHCA Spring Newsletter

IMHCA Participates in Day on the Hill

The Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association was well represented at the Mental Health Advocacy Coalition's Day on the Hill. On Thursday, February 1, IMHCA representatives Karen Cordes, Marie Kent, Erik Oostenink, and Christy Royston were stationed at a table at the Des Moines Capital Building from 9:00 – 1:00 to educate legislators and other professionals on the Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association and the roles Licensed Mental Health Counselors play throughout the state.



Individuals walked throughout the capital rotunda to see many groups present information on their agencies and associations. The Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Orchard Place, The Rainbow Center, the Iowa Nursing Association and several other agencies supporting those with mental illness and substance abuse came together to encourage legislators to pass legislation on the following topics:

1. Open Access – This encourages open access for mental health drugs. Requiring prior authorization for mental health medications may interfere with patients receiving the treatment that their physician/health care provider has determined to be most appropriate. Further, requiring a person with mental illness to try less effective medicines before receiving the medication that is right for them, may extend that person's suffering, place them at risk for greater harm, and will in some cases increase hospitalization rates (at higher cost and in a system with inadequate in-patient treatment options).

2. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Workforce Shortage – Iowa is facing a shortage of mental health professionals to serve Iowa’s population. The shortage of mental health professionals hits those without insurance and those on Medicaid particularly hard. The Coalition encouraged legislator to consider scholarships, loan forgiveness and other programs to target individuals seeking careers in this field as well as more clinical pastoral education among Iowa’s clergy.
3. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Parity – During the 2005 Legislative Session, mental health parity was passed and signed into law. While this was a first step, changes are needed to enhance and include coverage for a number of mental health diagnoses and populations including those with Anxiety and Panic Disorders including PTSD, Substance Abuse, Eating Disorders, Pre and Post-natal Depressive Women, and Children and Adolescents.
4. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Jail Diversion – Current practice places individuals in jails and prisons instead of needed treatment programs. Legislators were encouraged to support the development of diversion programs to reduce the number of individuals incarcerated instead of in treatment programs. Furthermore, increasing funding for the Department of Corrections, community mental health centers, and substance abuse programs could ensure adequate staffing and resources to provide services to those on parole and involved in community-based corrections. Finally, establishing diversion plans so that person charged with crimes, once qualified, can be diverted from prison to community programs.

It was a privilege to serve the Association members at the Capital in presenting our interests. If you are interested in getting involved in shaping legislation, please contact the board at imhca.net.

