

# **Recommendations for Including Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder Prevention, Treatment, Rehabilitation, and Recovery in National Healthcare Reform:**

## **WELLNESS PROMOTION AND CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION INITIATIVES**

Reform of the national healthcare system represents a unique opportunity to improve our nation's health and curb the enormous costs associated with untreated chronic disease. Medical experts agree that substance use disorders and serious mental illnesses are chronic diseases that can be prevented and treated effectively. Research shows that mental illness and substance use disorders prevention and early interventions reduce the incidence of other costly co-occurring chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and certain cancers in both individuals and their family members. Chronic disease management practices that keep families healthy will improve public safety as well as contain skyrocketing health care costs.

Equitably and fully including mental illness and substance use disorders in national healthcare reform initiatives that promote wellness and seek to prevent chronic diseases will ensure that millions of Americans can lead healthier lives while the healthcare system reaps millions of dollars in health care savings.

Successful wellness promotion and chronic disease prevention initiatives in national healthcare reform must:

1. Cover the full range of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and recovery support services for all chronic diseases, including mental illnesses and substance use disorders, and ensure that these services are available to all of those in need, including family members.
2. Ensure that wellness promotion and chronic disease prevention initiatives include prevention of mental illness and substance use disorders, and link them to primary health care.
3. Create a "health and wellness" fund to improve health and prevent chronic diseases, including mental illness and substance use disorders. Activities of this fund should promote long-term recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders and their prevention.
4. Utilize a public health model for preventing substance use through the mobilization of multiple community sectors to organize, plan, implement and evaluate appropriate strategies and programs using an array of public and private resources.
5. Include incentives in public and private plans for covering interventions to prevent mental and emotional disorders.
6. Ensure that wellness promotion and chronic disease prevention initiatives include the community-wide capacity to implement environmental strategies and supports needed to promote prevention and sustain long-term recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorders.

1. The full range of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery support services for all chronic diseases, including serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders, should be covered. These services should be available to all of those in need, including family members.
  - Comprehensive health care reform should fully incorporate the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of substance use disorders and mental illness as both primary disabling conditions and co-occurring conditions with other chronic diseases.
  - Wellness initiatives should recognize that individuals with histories of serious mental illness and/or untreated substance use disorders often suffer from other chronic health conditions and that providing care for the primary mental illness and substance use disorder will help reduce the occurrence of other chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease, pulmonary disorders, and hypertension in individuals and, as research has shown, their family members.
  - Research has shown that stressful or traumatic childhood experiences can lead to social, emotional, and cognitive impairments that can increase the likelihood of unhealthy behavior, disease, disability and premature death. Initiatives that promote wellness and seek to prevent chronic disease should recognize that including funds for substance use disorder and mental illness prevention efforts is critical to preventing these adverse childhood experiences and the subsequent enormous costs to the healthcare system over the lifetime of those individuals.
  - To ensure the provision of mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery support services nationwide, healthcare reform should continue and enhance financing for publicly funded safety net programs, including the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant, the Mental Health Services Block Grant and discretionary programs. Because individuals access mental health and substance use disorder services most often through community-based providers supported by publicly funded programs, it is critical that financing for these services, as well as for coordination and other medical and social support services, be maintained and improved in the architecture of healthcare reform.
2. Wellness promotion and chronic disease prevention initiatives should include prevention of mental illness and substance use disorders, and link them to primary health care.
  - Public education and wellness initiatives should be incorporated with primary health care services and expanded to provide information that will help prevent mental illness and substance use disorders, and direct people to the services they need.
  - Reform should promote effective mental health check-ups, screening for substance use disorders and mental illness, and early intervention for mental health and substance use disorders across the lifespan, recognizing that half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and adolescents who use alcohol and other drugs are much more likely to misuse drugs and alcohol as adults.
  - Pre-natal and peri-natal screening for maternal depression and substance use disorders should be reimbursed and encouraged, as well as referral into treatment for those who need care.
3. A “health and wellness” fund should be created and funded to promote and improve health and prevent chronic diseases, including mental illness and substance use disorders.
  - Monies from a “health and wellness” fund should be directed toward the prevention of both mental illness and substance use disorders.

- A significant part of “health and wellness” funds should be targeted specifically for prevention and early identification of mental illness. Mental illness prevention initiatives should be aimed at addressing risk factors and increasing children's protective factors.
  - A significant part of “health and wellness” funds should be targeted specifically to prevent substance use disorders through universal prevention strategies and programs as well as among those groups shown to be most vulnerable, such as children of parents with substance use disorders, middle school students, children with identified mental health and learning disability issues, single teen mothers, and elderly alcohol users who also use prescription drugs. These prevention funds should target communities, schools, workplaces, families through parent and caregiver education, and individuals, through substance use disorder education and prevention programs for those of all ages.
  - A part of “health and wellness” funds should be directed towards programs that provide parents with the information and tools they need to prevent adolescent substance use disorders, such as best parenting practices, knowledge of risk factors, knowledge of emerging threats, and links to additional resources.
  - A part of “health and wellness” funds should be dedicated to educating parents and caretakers of children with mental illness or substance use disorders to help them better navigate the complicated treatment choices they face when seeking help for a child in need.
  - “Health and wellness” funds should include technical assistance grants aimed at better allowing communities to respond to their own mental illness and substance use disorder prevention needs to support health and wellness.
  - Mental illness and substance use disorder prevention efforts should be as comprehensive as possible, and include media and other broad-based campaigns as well as efforts targeted towards more specific, high-risk populations.
4. A public health model should be utilized to prevent substance use through the mobilization of multiple community sectors to organize, plan, implement and evaluate appropriate strategies and programs using an array of public and private resources.
- Comprehensive healthcare reform should include a public health model for preventing substance use using community mobilization to change norms and environments to promote and enhance prevention, resilience and recovery.
  - Broad-based community coalitions including public health and other appropriate community sectors should engage in community-wide education, awareness raising and environmental strategies to change norms and laws to help create community contexts that are conducive to prevention of and long-term recovery from substance use disorders. These broad-based coalitions should collect and analyze data, as well as conduct surveys and surveillance of substance use disorders and long-term recovery from substance use disorders in their communities over time to measure outcomes and results.
5. Healthcare reform should include incentives in all public and private plans for covering the following interventions to prevent mental and emotional disorders:
- Home visiting by public health nurses for low income first time mothers;
  - Coaching of caretakers of children regarding children’s social/emotional development needs as a component of pediatric care;
  - Screening for depression in pregnant and peri-natal women;
  - Mental health screenings as part of every well-child check-up from early childhood through adolescence; and

- Screening and early intervention (for both physical and mental health) services provided by school-based and child-care-based health programs.
6. Wellness and chronic disease prevention initiatives should include the supports needed to sustain long-term recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorders.
- Health care reform must promote overall health and wellness by addressing the full array of services needed to support sustained, long-term recovery from substance use disorders and/or mental illness. Successful recovery management includes life supports such as housing, transportation, education, employment and social connectedness and is among the full array of services needed to support sustained, long-term recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorders.
  - Peer-to-peer recovery support services help individuals in their communities initiate and sustain recovery and gain overall wellness. Support for community resources, including these peer services and other systems that are integral to sustaining recovery, must be supported and adequately funded. This should include tools to promote interaction and support among parents and families of teens with or in recovery from mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders.
  - There are significant barriers and restrictions facing people seeking to sustain their recovery from substance use disorders and/or mental illness beyond access to effective and appropriate treatment. Discrimination in employment, including in licensing and credentialing, education, housing, food stamps and other necessities of life hinders people with histories of substance use disorders and/or mental illness from successfully integrating into the community and becoming productive citizens. Targeting resources to identify and eliminate these legal and policy barriers is critical to a successful wellness strategy that supports individuals pursuing their sustained recovery.

The success of national healthcare reform will be judged on its ability to provide essential services to all Americans, improve overall health outcomes, and control costs. When addiction and mental illness issues are addressed and treated as the preventable, treatable diseases that they are, our health, criminal justice and social service systems will reap substantial cost savings while dramatically improving health and wellness. Equitable and full inclusion of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of, and recovery from, mental illness and substance use disorders in national healthcare reform will ensure that millions of people lead healthier lives, thereby strengthening individuals, families, communities, and our nation as a whole.