



February 13, 2013

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Office of the Governor
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

The California Mental Health Planning Council (CMHPC) is mandated by state and federal law to advocate on behalf of adults with severe mental illness and children with severe emotional disturbance and their families. On behalf of our constituents, we congratulate you on turning the corner on the state budget and are optimistic that the trend towards balance and solvency will continue.

The CMHPC Advocacy Committee urges you to reconsider your stand on the restoration of Medi-Cal "optional benefits" that have been lost over the last four years, specifically dental benefits. Our adult constituents represent the poorest of the populations supported by the safety net of social services. The SSI/SSA rates have been reduced to the bare minimum and the health benefits have similarly been cut back.

The non-Federally Required Adult Dental Services (FRADS) that were available have been eliminated altogether, and this has created enormous problems for some patients' health and wellbeing. Their prescribed medications sometimes contribute to their dental problems, and the oral pain they suffer prevents them from taking adequate nourishment needed to maintain health. Presently, the only services available for people in pain are the FRADS, which generally means they can get their teeth pulled, but only if a dentist can be located. Once all the teeth are pulled, there is no benefit for dentures or bridges.

As a group, people living with mental illness are nearly 4 times more likely to lose their teeth than the rest of the population due to their medications, lack of permanent housing, and lack of access to services. The alienation they suffer due to their appearance contributes to the stigma they encounter too often in their lives. Employment is an essential component of recovery, yet potential employers won't hire them based on their appearance.

If they cannot work, they cannot afford dental work to improve their health and appearance, and they continue to rely on the government for subsistence, and emergency room services become their only option to relieve the pain and fight infections.

The Pew Center on the States estimates that preventable dental conditions were the primary diagnosis in 830,590 visits to ERs nationwide in 2009 — a 16 percent increase from 2006. California's ERs received more than 83,000 visits resulting from preventable dental problems in 2007, and these figures precede the elimination of FRADs in 2009, so present day statistics are no doubt much higher.

Under the Affordable Care Act, dental services are an essential health benefit for children, but not for adults. Adults can seek treatment for diabetes, but not for dental decay resulting from the use of lifesaving, prescribed medications. Kaiser has reported that for every person who does not have health insurance, there are three who don't have dental insurance, and that in 2010, 22% of low-income adults had gone five years or more without a dental visit, or had never had a visit. This is a social justice issue as much as a health issue. People should not be forced to live in such pain when it is so preventable.

The CMHPC is asking your Administration to review its policies and develop some strategies that will address this situation. This might be accomplished through changes in the Business and Professions code that might allow lower level practitioners to provide basic services or by creating some type of incentive program that would encourage dentists to treat the uninsured in exchange for some type of tax benefit.

Thank you for allowing this opportunity to express our concerns. We are optimistic that your Administration can develop creative and responsive plans to alleviate the preventable suffering that exists amongst the poorest and least represented of your constituents. If you have any questions, please contact our Executive Officer, Jane Adcock at (916) 319-9343 or email at jane.adcock@cmhpc.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Barbara Mitchell, Co-Chair
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



Gail Nickerson, Co-Chair
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



John Ryan, Chair
California Mental Health Planning Council

cc: The Honorable:

Senator Ed Hernandez, Chair, Senate
Health Committee
Assembly Member Richard Pan, Chair,
Assembly Committee on Health
John A. Perez, Speaker of the Assembly
Darrell Steinberg, Senate President
Pro Tempore
Richard Van Horn, Chair, Mental
Health Services Oversight and
Accountability Commission
Scott Bain, Consultant, Senate Health
Committee

Kirsten Barlow, Associate Director of
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California Mental Health Directors
Association
California Senate Health Committee
California Senate Budget and Fiscal
Review Subcommittee 3 on Health
and Human Services
California Assembly Committee on
Health
California Assembly Budget
Subcommittee No. 1 on Health and
Human Services