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Let me begin by saying that I am pleased that the Governor has created this Mental Health and Wellness Commission and we have the opportunity to provide public comment on this very important and personal matter that is facing our state. I would also hope that the work product of this commission and the testimony that you have been receiving will be utilized to make the many improvements that are needed. My experience in a similar effort under Governor Granholm was a dismal failure due to the failure by the state to implement recommendations that people worked so hard on to improve mental health in the state.

I am the father of someone with a mental illness and as a result an advocate for mental health change. As President of NAMI Metro - Oakland, Wayne, Macomb counties I can tell you that society and the system is failing so many people. I hear this regularly from the many family members who attend education classes, support groups and call in to our help lines. ~~I understand this workgroup is dealing with Societal Impacts, Data/Outcomes and Stigma Reduction and Awareness~~ and five minutes is not much time. However, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the many members that we have as well as myself personally.

First on Societal Impacts, Stigma Reduction and Awareness there needs to be a comprehensive education plan about mental illness. So many in our society do not understand that an illness of the brain (mental illness) is the same as any other illness. This is evident by the discrimination that exists by not having parity in coverage for mental illnesses. This sends the message to everyone in society that an illness of the brain is different and therefore should be treated substandard. In every sector of our society there is a lack of knowledge and with that comes stigma. Here are a few areas that need to be addressed:

- Police need to be educated and trained like other states in Crises Intervention Training (CIT)
- Public Schools need to bring in education to the classrooms about mental illness.
- Legislators need education so decisions that are made are made to help those who need help.
- Hospitals and E.R.'s lack understanding on how to handle mental health patients
- The media needs to educate the community about mental illness rather than demonizing it
- The judicial system needs better tools to work with in order to help rather than incarcerate

Moreover, when individuals cannot get access to treatment the results can be devastating. The economic analysis is in and that is Treatment vs. Incarceration is the solution. When I get calls like the call I had yesterday from a mom whose son was admitted to a hospital with serious illness including violence and after only a few days told "come pick him up he is being released or we will release him to a homeless shelter", isn't that a negative impact on society. Then when asked about a follow up treatment plan, it was "he needs to see his Therapist". The mom in tears says that her son has been on the waiting list for 16 months to get a therapist through the system. This must be seen as unacceptable. I understand the systems are stretched, the budgets are cut so the system takes care of the most seriously ill. But guess what, those who are trying to get service but aren't considered sick enough are the ones that will end up in the hospital or on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper.

If someone were to come into the Doctors office and it was determined they had stage one cancer, they would not say well we will consider treating you when you reach stage four. In many cases that is what happens to individuals with a mental illness. Left untreated the symptoms will get worse and the impact typically ends up with a bad outcome for everyone.

What I can say with certainty is that mental illness exists in every state, every city and every neighborhood. One in 4 adults experiences a mental health disorder in a given year. One in 17 live with a serious mental illness and 1 in 10 children has a serious mental or emotional disorder. Yet fewer than one-third of adults and one-half of children with a diagnosed mental disorder receive mental health services in a given year. There are many reasons for this, including:

- Lack of knowledge about mental illness
- Stigma, or rather social stereotypes, that prevail towards mental illness which deters people from seeking help
- Individuals and families don't know to get help, that treatment works or where to go for help
- When individuals or families do seek help, the services are frequently not available. This situation has grown worse in recent years with budget cuts, narrowing of eligibility criteria for services, limits on what services are available, etc.

NAMI will continue to advocate for improvements in services, early intervention and welcomes all to discuss the many issues that individuals with mental illness and their families face every day and the NEED FOR CHANGE.

To this end, I would recommend the following:

- The Governor should prioritize funding to increase the continuity of housing options for individuals with mental illness, including long term and transitional secure residential care. Too many people with serious mental illness are living on the streets because there are not enough supportive housing options available. Many individuals end up in jail or prison unnecessarily because they have no place to go that has sufficient supervision.
- Allocate additional resources to communities to meet the mental health needs of children and their families. Youth who require a high level of care are winding up in the juvenile justice system, and young people are falling through the cracks as they transition into adulthood.
- Legislation giving judges the ability to court order outpatient treatment

Violent tragedies should not have to occur before the state realizes that mental health care must be a priority. We are parents. We are friends. We are individuals living with these illnesses. We get it. We've been there.

Society has overcome the stigma that was associated with Cancer and Aids through education. It is time that we do the same for mental illness and the work of your commission can help. There are many people like myself who stand ready to help in that education process.