



Dear Friend,

Imagine you're the parent of a child with autism, or a senior citizen on a fixed income struggling with schizophrenia, or a single mom in danger of losing your job because depression makes it almost impossible for you to get out of bed in the morning, or a young soldier with such severe post traumatic stress disorder that your antisocial behavior and uncontrollable bursts of temper are alienating everyone around you.

And now imagine you've reached the limits of your insurance coverage for mental illness, or the only anti-psychotic medication that works for you isn't on Medicare's pre-approved list of drugs, or a diagnosis of depression isn't considered a covered disability by your employer's health plan, or your bursts of temper have landed you in jail instead of a psychiatric treatment center.

What would you do? Where would you go to find appropriate and affordable mental health care?

If you're like 60% of the more than 54 million Americans who experience mental health problems within a given year the answer is, "Struggle to cope with it on your own," because for far too many people in the United States there is no such thing as affordable, accessible mental health care.

The reasons are many—limited or non-existent insurance coverage for mental illness, restricted access to the most effective psychotropic medications for people on Medicare, social stigma, and severe cuts in government funding for mental health services to meet State budget shortfalls. Unfortunately, however, not investing in effective, quality mental health care means the State and society will pay in other, more costly ways through increased emergency room visits, homelessness, an overburdened criminal justice system, lost productivity, lost earnings—and incalculable human suffering.

But it doesn't have to be that way. And the first step in alleviating some of the burdens of mental illness is adequate treatment of mental disorders, which means adequate funding for community mental health programs.

That's where we come in. The Mental Health Association (MHA) in San Diego is a tireless advocate for mental health issues in San Diego and the state of California. Since our founding in 1942, our mission has been to promote mental health and to improve the care, treatment, and quality of life of people coping with mental illness. We do this, in part, by educating the public and—more importantly—by educating our legislature about the extent of mental illness in our country, the toll it takes on our citizens and our society, and the most effective ways to treat it.

MHA does not spend money on lobbyists or to curry favor among legislators. Instead, we concentrate our efforts on grassroots community-based advocacy. We seek to increase public understanding of mental health issues, reduce barriers to accessing mental health care, and ensure access to effective medications and services. We work to educate our local, state, and federal legislators on the importance and cost-effectiveness of mental health care. Our goal is to affect the kind of change necessary to provide access to affordable mental health care to all of our nation's citizens. Examples of what we have been able to accomplish in the last few years through our grassroots advocacy efforts include:

- ***Insurance Parity Law*** (July 2000), which requires all private health insurance plans to provide equal coverage for physical health and selected mental health conditions, including serious mental illnesses in adults and serious emotional disturbances in children.
- ***Medicare Modernization Act*** (December 2003) particularly the ***Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit*** to make sure even the poorest senior citizens have the mental health care treatment they need, including the most effective drugs to combat it.
- ***Mental Health Services Act*** (November 2004), which provides dedicated funding for assertive community mental health treatment programs through a 1% tax on all taxable incomes over \$1 million. This will provide mental health programs for un- and under-served children, youth, and adults in every county in California.

Some of the issues we are currently working on include coverage of mental health benefits in health plans at levels equal to other healthcare coverage, ending the criminalization of mental illness, and increasing access to new and breakthrough medications. We need your help to continue this important work. Our goal is to raise \$25,000, which will enable us to continue our advocacy and education efforts. A contribution of \$5 to \$25 is suggested to help us meet our goal but any amount would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Luton
Executive Director

P.S. (Your donation to the Mental Health Association of San Diego will help us sustain our advocacy efforts on behalf of those least able to advocate for themselves.)