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MAKING PARITY REAL SYMPOSIUM EXPLORES STATE POLICY CHANGES NEEDED TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION TREATMENT

Rep. Sandy Pasch, D.A. John Chisholm Join Expert Panel Nov. 23 at Medical College of Wisconsin

Milwaukee (Nov. 16, 2009)—A panel of leading mental health and addiction treatment experts in Milwaukee County will discuss the major statewide policy changes needed to improve treatment in Wisconsin during the Making Parity Real symposium.

Making Parity Real, the first in a statewide series, will be held from **8 a.m.-noon Monday, Nov. 23 at the Medical College of Wisconsin Alumni Hall (8701 Watertown Plank Rd.)**. Attendance is free but registration is required. For more information or to register visit www.MakingParityReal.org.

Panelists will explore issues such as the quantity, cultural competency and location of treatment providers; the adequacy of public and private funding sources; and the ability of non-medical providers to administer treatment.

Wisconsin Rep. Sandy Pasch (D-Whitefish Bay) and David R. Riemer, Director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, will moderate discussion, with Milwaukee County District Attorney John T. Chisholm delivering closing remarks.

“This is an incredibly important symposium that will help shape the future of mental health and addiction treatment in Wisconsin,” said Rep. Pasch. “Panelists have been carefully chosen in order to foster a collaborative dialogue across the full spectrum of stakeholders in Milwaukee County. Their perspectives are crucial to establishing informed public policy that will increase access to vital mental health and substance abuse treatment.”

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Making Parity Real / Add One

Making Parity Real panelists on Nov. 23 will be:

- Clarence Chou, M.D., Staff Psychiatrist, Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division
- Dr. Francine Feinberg, Executive Director, Meta House
- Rev. Mark Fossie, President and CEO, M&S Clinical Services
- Tito Izard, M.D., Medical Director, Milwaukee Health Services
- Lyn Malofsky, Executive Director, Warmline, Inc.
- Carlyle Chan, M.D., Professor, Medical College of Wisconsin
- Rob Henken, President, Public Policy Forum
- Walter Laux, Director, Adult Community Services Branch, Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division
- David L. Moulthrop, Ph.D, President and CEO, Rogers Memorial Hospital
- Vani Ray, M.D., Psychiatrist and Addictionologist Consult Liaison, Aurora Behavioral Health Services, Aurora Health Care

Making Parity Real will also feature updates on the *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-343)*, emerging Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services regulations on addiction and mental health treatment, and Wisconsin legislative proposals including the *Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Abuse Parity Act (SB-362/AB-512)*.

Organizers of Making Parity Real plan to hold similar symposia in locations throughout Wisconsin. Each symposium will feature local experts discussing the role state public policy can play to improve mental health and addiction treatment in Wisconsin.

Making Parity Real is sponsored by the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative and the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force.

Ensuring Access to Mental Health, Addiction Benefits

Nationally and in Wisconsin we are moving toward health insurance “parity,” in which benefits for addiction and mental health treatment equal those for physical medical care. The *Wellstone-Domenici Act*, which went into effect Oct. 3, 2009, mandates that treatment of substance abuse and mental illness under certain group health insurance plans provided by employers of 51 or more employees can be no more restrictive than benefits provided for medical and surgical conditions under the plans.

In addition, the *Act* provides that financial requirements for mental health and addiction benefits under these plans—such as co-pays and deductibles—may be no more restrictive than the most common financial requirements applicable to medical and surgical benefits.

Making Parity Real / Add Two

On Oct. 7, Rep. Pasch and Sen. David Hansen (D-Green Bay) announced the *Wisconsin Parity Act*. This important bill will require most group health plans in Wisconsin to provide mental health and substance abuse disorder benefits at parity levels, increasing treatment for hundreds of thousands of people in Wisconsin, saving lives and lowering costs.

According to Riemer, the trend toward parity is positive. However, much is yet to be worked out.

“While ‘parity’ is an important step toward guaranteeing that people living with addiction and mental illness actually get the treatment they need, it’s only the first step,” said Riemer. “The premise of Making Parity Real is to learn from the providers, advocates and specialists that work in the treatment delivery system what problems must be rectified in order to ensure that appropriate treatment is fully available in appropriate locations in an appropriate amount of time. Based on information learned at this symposium and similar symposia in other locations statewide, the Public Policy Institute plans to present state lawmakers and policymakers with recommendations to close Wisconsin’s treatment gaps.”

Mental Illness and Addiction Are Costly, Pervasive Diseases

Mental illness and substance disorders account for the two leading causes of disability in the U.S., nearly 37 percent of all disability. Growing evidence indicates that limiting mental health and substance disorder benefits increases the overall cost of healthcare.

According to a study by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, in 2005-06, 22.5 percent of individuals in Wisconsin age 18-25 suffered from alcohol dependence or abuse, compared to 17.5 percent nationally. At the same time, 21 percent of individuals age 18-25 needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol use, compared to 17 percent nationally.

The Community Advocates Public Policy Institute has a clear and simple goal: To explain why so many Milwaukeeans are poor, and to develop and implement a practical strategy to greatly reduce the level of poverty in our community and offer the poor the tools they need to lead better lives.