

Jason Brame

From: Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative [jasonb@communityadvocates.net]
Sent: Monday, October 12, 2009 4:00 PM
To: Jason Brame
Subject: MATI: New Wisconsin Parity Act Stands to Increase Mental Health, Addiction Benefits for Hundreds of Thousands of Wisconsinites



e-Newsletter

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• **Wed., Oct. 14, 9-10:30 a.m.**
 Topic: Addiction as a public health issue. (Location: Milwaukee Christian Center, 2137 W. Greenfield Ave., in the gym). Download [flyer](#).

On Oct. 7, Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) and Representative Sandy Pasch (D-Whitefish Bay) announced the *Wisconsin Mental Health and Substance Abuse Parity Act*. This important bill will require all group health plans in Wisconsin to provide mental health and substance abuse disorder benefits at parity levels. Such group health plans are typically now not covered by the federal *Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008*.

Read David Riemer's Remarks on the Bill

This legislation will increase treatment for hundreds of thousands of people in Wisconsin, save lives and lower costs.

For more information visit www.ParityForWisconsin.org.

The *Wisconsin Parity Act* Closes Gaps in Federal Law

Upcoming MATI Work Group Meetings Communications

• **Wed., Nov. 4, 9-10 a.m.**
(Location: Springfield College,
744 N. 4th St., Ste 300) Contact:
[Hilary Chavez](#), (414) 270-2950.

Advocacy

• **Wed., Oct. 21, 9-10 a.m.**
(Location: Community
Advocates, 744 N 4th St. Ste
200) Contact: [Genyne Edwards](#),
(414) 270-2952.

System Redesign

• **Time, location TBD.** Contact:
[Robert Cherry](#), (414) 270-2953.

Resources

[MATI Web Site](#)

[MATI Blog](#)

[Closing the Addiction
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[Community Advocates Public
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The *Wellstone-Domenici Act* went into effect Oct. 3, and its impact will begin to be felt as insurance plans renew over the coming months. While the new law adds millions of citizens to the list of people who have equitable insurance coverage for mental illness or substance abuse, it has one serious limitation: it does not protect virtually all insured individuals who work in businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

More than 700,000 Wisconsin citizens who work in these small businesses will not be protected by the *Wellstone-Domenici Act*. The *Wisconsin Parity Act* closes the gap they fall into, which benefits both these employees and the small businesses in which they work.

Several states have successfully enacted parity legislation! Those states have not seen significant increases in premiums and no significant increase in the number of businesses that have discontinued employee health coverage. In addition, businesses that offer health plans that include mental health and addiction coverage have experienced reductions in absenteeism, turnover and disability costs while at the same time showing increases in productivity.

Advocate Now for Passage of the *Wisconsin Parity Act*

- **Ask your legislator to be a cosponsor.** Call or email your legislators before Oct. 21 to encourage them to sign on as a cosponsor of this legislation. Find your legislators [here](#). Read Senator Hanson's and Representative Pasch's [memo](#) urging their colleagues to sign on as cosponsors of the legislation.
- **Contact your legislators to advocate for passage.** This legislation is virtually identical to parity bills introduced in previous sessions, with certain added features specifically designed to fill in the gap created following enactment of the *Wellstone-Domenici Act*.
- MATI's next step will be to prepare for hearings in the Senate and in the Assembly. Please contact us if you have someone in mind to represent your organization's unique perspective on the problems of addiction and / or mental illness.

Do you know someone who would be able to tell a personal story that relates to this policy at a hearing? Do you have specific data or other information that legislators need to hear? Let us know by contacting Hilary Chavez, MATI Program Coordinator, at (414) 270-2950 or emailing hilaryc@communityadvocates.net.

Addiction: What Is the Public Health Perspective?

The upcoming MATI Program and Policy Committee meeting

features a presentation from the Milwaukee Health Department, **9-10:30 a.m. Wednesday, Oct. 14**. The meeting is at the Milwaukee Christian Center, 2137 W. Greenfield Ave, Milwaukee, in the gymnasium.

Join Dr. Geoffrey Swain, Chief Medical Officer, City of Milwaukee Health Department; Dr. Paul Hunter, Associate Medical Director, City of Milwaukee Health Department, and Ron Cisler, Ph.D., from the Center for Urban Population Health, to explore addiction as a public health issue. Reframing the issue can give us new tools to use as we try to change how society views people with addiction, how we pay for treatment and how we can influence public policy.

Download a [flyer](#) for the presentation.

The meeting will also feature:

- A presentation from Thomas Reed, First Assistant Public Defender, Office of the State Public Defender.
- An update on national healthcare reform, federal and state parity laws, and proposals and MATI advocacy efforts from MATI staff.

For more information call Hilary Chavez, MATI Program Coordinator, at (414) 270-2950 or email hilaryc@communityadvocates.net.

Milwaukeeans Support Increasing Access to Drug, Alcohol Addiction Treatment, New Poll Shows

Broad, Bipartisan Support for Treatment Reform Mirrors National Trends

See the article "[Milwaukeeans Back Addiction Coverage](#)" in the *Milwaukee Business Journal*.

A majority of Milwaukeeans supports efforts to make drug and alcohol addiction treatment more accessible for all, and they're willing to pay higher insurance premiums to do so, according to new polling data released by the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI), a project of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute.

The poll, conducted by the Washington, D.C. firm Lake Research Partners, shows that 74 percent of Milwaukeeans support increased access to addiction treatment as part of health care reform, including majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans. In addition, 65 percent said that they would pay an increased monthly health care premium-an extra \$2 per month-to ensure everyone had improved access.

This broad, bipartisan support in Milwaukee mirrors national trends: 77 percent of Americans support including addiction treatment in health reform, 56 percent strongly; and 69 percent of Americans support paying two dollars more per month in health insurance premiums to make addiction treatment more accessible and affordable.

The survey was fielded in Milwaukee Aug. 6-12 by 400 adults age 18 or older; the overall margin of error is +/-5 percent. Complete polling data is available at www.ca-mati.org.

"Addiction to drugs and alcohol knows no political affiliation; it's an equal-opportunity disease that can affect any of us, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal," said David Riemer, Director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute and MATI Program Director. "In the midst of what has been a contentious debate on health care reform, it's no surprise that increasing access to treatment for those suffering from the life-threatening disease of addiction has such broad support."

Polling results showed that:

- 93 percent agree that Milwaukee County has an alcohol and drug addiction problem.
- 78 percent believe that addiction is a disease, and 74 percent believe that addiction should be treated as a chronic health condition like diabetes or other diseases.
- Three-quarters believe that treatment works to help people overcome addiction.
- Nearly four out of every 10 surveyed believe that treatment improves the health of individuals and families suffering from addiction.

"This polling reveals a high-level of understanding in Milwaukee of the causes of addiction and the effectiveness of treatment to help those suffering from addiction to get well," said Riemer. "The public no longer accepts outdated attitudes that paint those suffering from addiction as weak-willed, and treatment as an unnecessary luxury for the privileged few.

Addiction treatment must be available when and where it is most appropriate to anyone who needs it, and insurance companies must pay for it without artificial limits or excessive cost."

Nationally, an awareness gap exists around insurance coverage for treatment. While nearly three-quarters (73 percent) think health insurance plans should cover treatment for addiction, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of insured Americans are not sure whether their plan currently covers treatment services.

Only 26 percent of Americans say there are enough affordable, accessible, quality treatment centers and services in their community, while nearly half-47 percent-reports an inadequate number of treatment centers.

Additionally, 87 percent of Americans see treatment as an ongoing process, sometimes needing more than one period of treatment.

Addiction Treatment Gap Affects Public Health and Safety

Milwaukee suffers from a severe treatment gap. A study by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that in 2004 more than 82,000 people needed but did not receive addiction treatment in Milwaukee County.

This massive gap extends beyond Milwaukee. A federal study found that in 2007, 23.2 million Americans needed treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, but only 10 percent were able to receive it. The vast majority of those who need help are unable to get addiction treatment due to lack of health insurance, inadequate insurance coverage or a lack of treatment services in communities.

Untreated addiction has severe consequences. According to a joint statement of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, each year in Wisconsin drug and alcohol use is responsible for more than 90,000 arrests, 2,100 deaths and \$4.6 billion in associated costs.

"As a society we are, sadly, all too familiar with the treatment gap, the massive toll it takes and the huge cost it extracts in money and lives," said Riemer. "But I think we are in the midst of a great movement to close this gap. As health insurance reform progresses, we must continue our work to ensure that the final bill includes a strong addiction treatment benefit."

In June, MATI released polling data that showed three-quarters of Americans know someone personally who has been addicted to alcohol or drugs. Personal experience with addiction spans all demographic groups.

Additionally, half of Americans (49 percent) do not think they would be able to afford the costs of treatment if they or a family member needed it; and three-quarters (75 percent) of Americans are concerned that people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs many not be able to get treatment because they lack insurance coverage or cannot afford it.

Wisconsin Warrior Summit: Thursday, Oct. 22

Summit Examines Mental Health Needs of Veterans and Programs in Place to Support Them

The Wisconsin Warrior Summit is a conference for mental health professionals, community organizations, veterans, and their families "Helping the veteran and their family who survived the war, survive the peace..." The Summit is dedicated to coordinating a comprehensive community response to the mental health needs of veterans and their families.

Through keynotes and breakout sessions, which will feature the voices and perspectives of veterans themselves, the Summit will inform clinical professionals, veterans and their families, as well as community social service organizations and the general public on the needs of veterans and their families, and the treatment and programs in place to support them.

The Summit is 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 22, at the Milwaukee County War Memorial (750 N. Lincoln Memorial Dr.). For more information or to register, visit www.WIWarriorProject.org.

Sessions include:

- Legal and Criminal Issues for Veterans
- The Warrior and Addiction (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse)
- Challenges Facing the Warrior: Homelessness, Financial, Housing, and Employment
- Death of a Warrior: How a Family Copes
- Warrior on Deployment: Support for Vets and Family
- Peacekeepers from the Front Line to the Blue Line: Law Enforcement Officers Called to Deployment
- Soul Wound, Warrior Spirit: A First Nations Perspective on Healing the Injuries of Warfare
- The Woman Warrior
- Reclaiming Life After War: Building Resilience
- Recognizing Changes: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Suicide and Pain
- Treating Stress Disorders: Current (and Future) Treatments
- Military Families: Navigating the Road Home

The Wisconsin Warrior Project is a collaborative effort designed to engage veterans groups, community organizations, mental health professionals and the general public in learning about the mental health and other issues facing veterans and their families and providing direction in continuing to disseminate this information to the larger community. The Wisconsin Warrior Summit is the initial step in this effort.

The Summit is sponsored by Dry Hooch: A Place for Veterans to Reconnect, Mental Health America of Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Disability Rights Wisconsin and Easter Seals Disability Services.

The Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI) is a collaboration among local stakeholders -- including treatment providers, public health agencies, law enforcement, faith-based agencies, advocates and members of the recovery community -- to close the addiction treatment gap in Milwaukee County and ensure that everyone who needs treatment can receive it. MATI is sponsored by a grant from the Open Society Institute, Baltimore, with additional funding from the Helen Bader Foundation, the Zilber Family Foundation and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Visit MATI online at www.ca-mati.org.

MATI is a project of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute.

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