



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact: Jason Brame (jasonb@communityadvocates.net)

Phone: (414) 475-6253, ext. 303; cell: (414) 477-3940

ADDICTION TREATMENT WILL HELP MAKE HEALTH REFORM MORE AFFORDABLE, NEW ANALYSIS SHOWS

Treatment's "Unforeseen Benefits" Include Reduced Hospital Stays, Emergency Room Visits

Milwaukee (July 30, 2009)—Providing treatment to Americans suffering from an addiction to alcohol and drugs will lead to substantial health care savings totaling billions of dollars over a decade, according to a new white paper released jointly by the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI) and Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap.

The white paper, "Unforeseen Benefits: Addiction Treatment Reduces Health Care Costs," cites studies showing that addiction treatment will help to decrease emergency room visits and shorten hospital stays, as well as reduce the complications associated with addiction's effects on chronic illnesses and other conditions.

"Unforeseen Benefits" is available for download at www.ca-mati.org.

The white paper highlights the proven cost-savings and health benefits that flow from investments in alcohol and drug addiction treatment—savings and benefits that would be extremely meaningful to Milwaukee County and Wisconsin, which suffer from profound treatment gaps. The most recent analysis prepared by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that in 2004, 66,240 Milwaukee County residents 12 years and older needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol addiction. Another 16,020 residents needed but did not receive treatment for drug addiction.

A separate SAMHSA study showed that in Wisconsin in 2005-06, 21 percent of individuals age 18-25 needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol use, compared to 17 percent nationally—the fourth consecutive year Wisconsin's results were higher than the national average.

According to David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute and program director for the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative, addiction treatment results in significant cost-savings for health care systems compared with the cost of not treating addictions. The savings include reduced costs for treating other general medical and chronic illness conditions.

—more—

Addiction Treatment / Add One

“As lawmakers work to reform our broken health care system, we must keep in mind the important role that addiction and mental health treatment play in lowering overall costs and saving lives,” said Riemer. “Health care reform should include full access to addiction treatment to help contain costs and achieve higher quality health care.”

Among the findings of “Unforeseen Benefits:”

- Peer-reviewed research and studies show that treatment of addiction, a pervasive yet treatable chronic disease, can contain costs. For example, one study showed that total medical costs were reduced 26 percent among a group of patients who received treatment addiction. Another study showed that a group of at-risk alcohol users who received brief counseling recorded 20 percent fewer emergency department visits and 37 percent fewer days of hospitalization.

- More than 1.7 million costly emergency department visits a year are associated with drug misuse or abuse, according to a 2006 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Drug Abuse Warning Network.

“Untreated addiction directly contributes to many medical conditions such as heart disease, cancer and stroke, and frequently worsens or complicates other diseases and illnesses,” said Riemer. “A system in which addiction treatment is fully funded and delivered appropriately will make Milwaukee a healthier, safer community.”

The Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative promotes sweeping change in policy, financing and delivery in order to make addiction treatment available on a parity basis for all who seek treatment. Community Advocates, Inc. serves as the lead agency for the initiative on behalf of more than 80 partners, including law enforcement, public health organizations, treatment providers and advocates.

Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap seeks to create awareness of—and increase resources to close—an alarming gap in the availability of drug and alcohol addiction treatment for Americans who need it.

The white paper was released at a Washington, D.C. briefing, “Healing Mind and Body: Behavioral Health and Reform,” hosted by the Alliance for Health Reform (www.allhealth.org) and co-sponsored by Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap is a national program initiated by the Open Society Institute and involving nine other local and national organizations working to expand addiction treatment. This initiative is designed to create an awareness of—and increase resources to close—an alarming treatment gap: currently, four out of five Americans who need drug and alcohol addiction treatment are unable to get it. The initiative aims to mobilize public support for expanded treatment by increasing public funding, broadening insurance coverage, and achieving greater program efficiency.

The Open Society Institute, a private operating and grantmaking foundation, works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. OSI works in over 60 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as in the United States.