

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEIU, Service Employees International Union, Position Paper on the Mental Health Services Act

April 2005

Working Together Works...



SECTION ONE

Vision Statement

The Service Employees International Union embraces the transformation of the mental health system. We, as mental health workers, have spent our work days alongside clients and family members struggling with the current mental health service delivery system and wishing for an opportunity to make real change. Now, SEIU members bring our strength of firsthand knowledge, commitment, and ability to the process of planning and implementing the MHSA. The key to success will be for workers, clients and families to have a formal voice in envisioning, creating, and implementing the MHSA.

Our vision of the workers in a transformed system includes each worker having necessary supports and tools to meet goals for workers, clients and family members. We believe that cultural competence is a crucial element that includes staff training, diversity that reflects the community, location of programs, linkages to primary care and religious communities, client and family members as staff, and identifying and providing services to unserved and underserved communities. We believe

that as we move towards transformation, training will be one of the most crucial elements leading to success. Training of workers, clients, family members, managers and others is needed to move toward a common vision of a new system built on all voices being heard, respected and included in all decisions. **Our vision is a successful transformation based on a “bottom up” approach led by workers, clients, and family members coming together to use their many years of struggle, observation and experience to build a new system that meets the goals we all have identified.**

SECTION TWO

Services and Funding

Our goal for services is simple: adults need to have the opportunity to live as independently as possible in their communities and children need to live in their homes with their families. In order to meet this goal, we need a flexible, creative, and community-based array of services that fills the gaps which plague the current system.

CHILDREN’S SERVICES AND TRANSITION AGE YOUTH

We seek to have children stay with their families first, and for whatever time that

goal is not possible, to be as close as possible, staying within their home communities, or their home counties. This security and continuity in children's lives should be reinforced by forming partnerships with schools, recreation facilities, and other agencies with which children and their families interact.

ADULTS AND OLDER ADULTS

To have a truly client-centered approach to mental health services we believe that providing clients with the best quality of life should be our central focus. Every client should have a home, be given the chance to build meaningful relationships, choose social and recreational activities, and be part of his/her community.

INNOVATIONS

As mental health service workers we see the possibilities for improvement and change. We encourage counties to consult with mental health workers when seeking ideas for innovative programs, and allow staff to develop new programs.

SECTION THREE *Workforce*

As the leading voice for mental health workers in a range of job positions, settings, and localities throughout California, we call for county and state stakeholders to address key workforce considerations as we jointly seek to transform the mental health system of services in the state.

VOICE IN CLIENT SERVICE PROVISION AND MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

With our unique viewpoint, we believe that a mental health system with an effective worker voice will be a better system. Therefore, we insist that no MHSA (or other mental health) funding should be used to assist or deter mental health workers when they are organizing

a union to accomplish any of the priorities set forth in this paper.

STAFF RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

As direct service providers, we see firsthand how clients suffer from the high rate of line staff turnover. In order to transform the mental health system to provide the highest quality client services and promote recovery, the implementation of MHSA must address recruitment and retention.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Building on the experience and skill of the current workforce, we strongly urge that existing workers be supported and given every opportunity to take on new jobs in the changing mental health service system through promotions and career ladders.

ADHERENCE TO PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Given additional funding from the MHSA and the emphasis on providing "whatever it takes" to serve clients rather than whatever services can be billed to a particular funding stream, we advocate for a focus on providing effective services as the basis for making decisions about client services. Realistic caseload levels must be established and enforced to protect quality services for clients.

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES NEEDS

Workers need adequate and confidential space to work with clients. Vehicles for mobile services, cell phones, computer and technological equipment, and training to use these tools are all important supports for the comprehensive nature of work funded by the MHSA. Suitable building space, appropriate equipment, and harmonious environment also reinforce professional work standards and promote worker retention.