



October 24, 2017

Contact: Michael Shafer, President, Mental Health America of Arizona, Board of Directors, 520-349-2215

High Rates of Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders Reflects our State's Lack of Invest in Education and Safety Net Programs

Mental Health America, the oldest mental health advocacy organization in the United States just released it's annual *The State of Mental Health in America 2017* report. The report utilizes data from 15 national data bases and surveys collected during 2015 to provide a portrait of mental health in America. In a comparison of states, Arizona received an overall ranking of 49th, just above the state of Nevada and just below the state of Mississippi. As the state affiliate chapter Board Members, we know that this ranking does not reflect the innovation and progressive community-based integrated behavioral health services available to some in Arizona, but rather point to other troubling indicators of the general state of behavioral health and wellbeing in the state that we call home.

The state of Arizona demonstrates some of the higher rates of mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, underage drinking, and opioid overdoses in the country. Arizona also demonstrates some of the lowest rates of investment in public education and highest rates of incarceration in the country. We believe these are not coincidences, but speak to the root causes of mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and poverty: a lack of investment in our children, families, and communities.

The state of Arizona also demonstrates some of the more innovative and effective community based behavioral health services in the country. Our state's Medicaid agency, the Arizona Health Care Containment System (AHCCCS), is widely regarded as one of the most efficient and innovative state Medicaid agencies in the countries. Arizona's community behavioral health care delivery system boasts some of the best developed housing, crisis management, jail diversion, peer-delivered and consumer-operated service programs in the country. Unfortunately, these services are available only if someone qualifies for Medicaid meaning you're either poor enough or disabled enough (in this case with a *serious* mental illness). If you are lucky enough to have private health insurance, chances are your mental health and/or substance use issues are not being as well monitored or managed as they could be by your physician. Why not? Because your insurance company may not be requiring them to do so.

The 2017 MHA Mental Health America report should be a wakeup call to all Arizonans. MHA-AZ looks forward to working with Governor Ducey and the elected members of our state legislature to address the issues of mental illness and substance use disorders. As a state, we must make wiser investments in school based programming that provides school counselors, mental health professionals and uniform screening in all schools, including charter schools, and all grades. We must restore funding to critical safety net programs, including TANF and in-home family support services. Stop the mass incarceration of people with untreated mental illness and substance use disorders. We must require private health insurance plans, regulated by the Arizona Insurance Commission, to provide full parity for mental health and substance use disorder services. Screening, prevention, and early intervention for mental illness and substance use disorders must come out of the shadows and be as routine as breast cancer screening, colorectal screening, or a pap smear.

MHA-AZ Board of Directors

Michael S. Shafer, Ph.D., Chair

Josh Mozell, J.D., Vice-Chair