



## **King County**

### **COMMUNITY LEGISLATIVE FORUM 2011 State Legislative Priorities for Mental Health**

#### **Maintain the Mental Health Safety Net and Reduce Administrative Burdens**

Despite the budget problems the state faces, cutting funding for critical mental health services will only increase the budget deficit, now and for many years to come. Significant cuts in funding for mental health treatment were made in the 2009-2011 biennial budget. Further cuts will jeopardize the safety net and result in the elimination of programs that divert people from more expensive services such as hospitals, jails and prisons. Reducing administrative requirements will help to preserve services that would otherwise have to be eliminated. Regional Support Networks (RSNs) have recommendations for revisions to the mental health Washington Administrative Code 388-865 that would reduce administrative costs for RSNs and community provider agencies.

#### **Support Additional Psychiatric Hospital Bed Capacity**

The need for new psychiatric hospital beds has reached a critical level. The state of Washington is dead last in the country in the number of community psychiatric hospital beds per capita. As a result, King County and other areas of the state frequently have nowhere to send people who have been involuntarily committed. The lack of sufficient involuntary treatment beds results in “boarding” people, which means leaving people held against their will in emergency rooms and non-psychiatric hospital beds, often for days, waiting for a treatment bed to open up. New legislation passed last session, 2SHB 3076, broadens the criteria for involuntary commitment and will result in the need for even more involuntary treatment beds. Action is needed now to address this crisis. At the very least, state hospital capacity must be maintained.

#### **Require Regional Support Networks to Pay for Court-Related Costs for Involuntary Commitments Sent to Other Regional Support Networks**

King County has, by far, the most involuntary treatment beds in the state, and other counties regularly send their involuntarily committed patients to King County’s hospitals. Current law requires the county where the court hearing takes place to bear the costs for the court proceedings. Legal costs in King County are paid by the King County Regional Support Network (KCRSN) using non-Medicaid funds. In 2009, KCRSN spent \$3.5 million on involuntary treatment court costs, and nearly 20 percent of the hearings were for people committed to King County from other counties. King County treatment funds should not be used to pay court costs for people sent to King County from other county RSNs. We support legislation introduced last session (Senate Bill 6733) to make RSNs responsible for the legal costs for the commitments they initiate.

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