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Media Relations

November 1, 2013

N.H. Listens Organizes Statewide Conversation on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Nov. 14

DURHAM, N.H. – N.H. Listens, a civic engagement initiative of the [Carsey Institute](#) at the University of New Hampshire, will facilitate [All Walks of Life: A Statewide Conversation on Mental Health and Substance Abuse](#) Thursday, Nov. 14, 2013.

“There are moments when the impact of mental illness and substance abuse become vivid to all of us -- the suicide death of someone in the community or the death of an innocent bystander in a DUI accident -- but the impact occurs at other less obvious levels but with equally significant consequences,” says Sheila Gardner, president of the New Hampshire Psychological Association.

“Job and school functioning are negatively influenced by mental illness and substance abuse. Relationships within the family, at work, and within the community are all negatively affected as well. There are measurable impacts on the physical health of people struggling with mental illness, even mild mental illness, or substance abuse. So, these issues matter a great deal at all levels of our society,” Gardner says.

Five leading behavioral health organizations have joined together to host these conversations: New Futures, New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association, National Alliance in Mental Illness-New Hampshire (NAMI-NH), New Hampshire Providers Association, and New Hampshire Psychological Association.

The conversations begin at 6 p.m. and will take place in six communities across the state: Berlin (White Mountain Community College), Concord (N.H. Audubon McLane Center), Keene (Bentley Commons), Nashua (Amherst Street Elementary School), Plymouth (Whole Village Family Resource Center), and Portsmouth (Portsmouth High School).

The New Hampshire conversations are part of a national initiative on behavioral health launched by the White House in coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

New Hampshire’s statistics on substance abuse and mental illness are startling:

- An estimated 1 out of every 10 residents has a diagnosable substance abuse disorder (Source: New Futures).
- Excessive alcohol use alone costs the state \$1.15 billion each year -- \$757 million in lost worker productivity, \$182 million in healthcare costs, \$88 million in criminal justice costs, and \$124 million in other costs including motor vehicle crashes and state and local tax revenue. (Source: New Futures)
- New Hampshire ranks first in the nation for underage alcohol use. (Source: New Futures)
- New Hampshire ranks second to last in the nation for people in need of substance abuse treatment being able to access it. (Source: New Futures)
- Close to 43,000 New Hampshire adults live with serious mental illness and about 14,000 children live with serious mental health conditions. (Source: NAMI-NH)
- For New Hampshire young people 15-24 years old, suicide is the second leading cause of death. (Source: NH DHHS)

- New Hampshire's public mental health system provides services to only 21 percent of adults who live with serious mental illnesses in the state. (Source: NAMI-NH)

"Alcohol and drug problems in New Hampshire are at epidemic proportions while at the same time state-funded prevention and treatment services have been significantly reduced. New Hampshire's mental health system is in crisis, with people often waiting days or weeks for a bed at a New Hampshire hospital," says Linda Saunders Paquette, executive director of New Futures.

The stigma and misperceptions of mental illness and substance abuse hamper treatment efforts.

"Studies show that less than half of individuals with mental health problems ever seek treatment. This rate holds true even for veterans who indicate they have a psychological injury. No other treatable medical condition is so often ignored. Negative attitudes and perceptions about mental illness and substance use disorders contribute to this as do serious barriers to accessing treatment," says Ken Norton, executive director of NAMI-NH.

To register for the conversation, visit <https://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/eventReg?oeidk=a07e8ecy1vx8b647d62&oseq=&c=&ch=>.

Since 2011, N.H. Listens has worked at the local and state level to support civil, public deliberation of complex issues affecting New Hampshire residents' everyday lives. We work with local and state leaders to share resources on dialogue design, train facilitators, and help towns create their own Listens communities. We are committed to neutrality in all the work we carry out to meet our mission of creating and sustaining a fair process for public engagement and action. For more information, visit <http://nhlistens.org/>.

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