

# *Georgia FULL COURT PRESS.*

## *Opening Doors to Recovery:*

### *A Call to Action*

Over 340,000 adults in Georgia—and tens of thousands of our children and youth—live with serious mental illnesses. Mental illness is common and highly treatable, yet too few in Georgia receive the care they need to experience recovery. The consequences touch every aspect of our communities—from our homes and businesses to our schools and our streets.

Mental illness and substance use disorders affect the workplace, costing Georgia's employers and estimated \$6.97 billion in lost productivity in 2007.<sup>i</sup>

Mental illness affects our public safety systems. Without adequate services and supports, persons with serious mental illness are overwhelming Georgia's jails and prisons.

Mental illness affects all Georgia's schools. Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, three-quarters by age 24.<sup>ii</sup>

Mental illness affects the health of Georgians from every walk of life, including our returning troops.

The crisis in our state hospital system reveals what we have known all along—we need a transformed mental health system that can provide the right care at the right time to promote recovery in the community. And we need your help. To transform care in Georgia will take more than funding and state agencies, it will take the efforts of business and community leaders working together to reduce stigma and become part of the solution. Today, I call on you to join me in *“Opening Doors to Recovery.”*

## *A Call to Action to Georgia's Community Leaders*

### 1) Reduce Stigma

Stigma prevents many people from recognizing and getting the help they need for mental health problems—and prevents others from understanding and embracing persons living with mental illness. Georgia's **business and faith communities** can provide the leadership needed to help change how individuals and communities view mental illness through education and anti-stigma campaigns.

### 2) Promote Innovation

**Innovative and evidence-based programs** are needed in every part of Georgia to help people with serious mental illness live successfully in the community. Georgia's business and faith leaders can inspire the community will to develop mental health services and supports that our State can be proud of.

### 3) Invigorate Local Solutions

Georgia's community leaders can not only help **identify gaps** in services and **barriers** to recovery, they can **provide invaluable leadership** in developing local solutions that result in excellent outcomes. Our community leaders can facilitate public-private partnerships and other approaches that address community needs, such as competitive employment for persons living with serious mental illness, through local collaboration.

# Opening Doors to Recovery

## 4) Activate the Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman

As Governor, I commit to appointing the position of the **Office of the Ombudsman** by September of this year with a strong leader who will have my full support to investigate deaths, abuse, and neglect in our mental health system and, equally importantly, to provide critical information about systemic problems and barriers to safe and effective care for persons with mental illness.

## 5) Form an Independent Department of Mental Health, Addiction Diseases and Developmental Disabilities

As Governor, I commit to forming **an independent Department of Mental Health, Addictive Diseases, and Developmental Disabilities** by March 2009. As the State of Georgia has grown, the multiple roles of our current Department of Human Services have resulted in an agency that is too large to work with the efficiency and responsiveness we need today, particularly in light of the pressing problems in our state hospital and community mental health systems.

I am committed to ensuring that Georgia's attention is focused on developing an excellent community system of care for those with mental health and on delivering quality care in our state hospitals. A separate Department of Mental Health will allow for strong leadership, streamlined management, and needed transparency and accountability for budgets and outcomes.

## 6) Create a Center for Transformation

As Governor, I commit to creating a **Center for Transformation** by November of this year that provides expert, accessible training and support for evidence-based and promising practices that promote recovery. The Center will also assist with developing and measuring meaningful outcomes for persons who use community mental health services. With this Center for Transformation, Georgia will proactively address these vital cornerstones of reinventing mental health care in our State.

## 7) Convene a Behavioral Health Collaborative

As Governor, I commit to convening a **Behavioral Health Collaborative** by September of this year that brings together the Commissioners of multiple state agencies, along with a board made up of legislators and consumer and family representatives, to create a multi-year comprehensive strategic plan that leverages resources, reduces fragmentation, improves coordination, and provides ease of access, clear standards of care, successful transitions, and excellent outcomes.

The Behavioral Health Collaborative will develop a set of consensus values that will guide the development, implementation and evaluation of mental health services. Lastly, the Behavioral Health Collaborative will recommend and coordinate behavioral health budgets to achieve the goals of the strategic plan and that accurately reflect community needs and priorities for services and supports for persons of all ages with serious mental health disorders.

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<sup>i</sup> The Milken Institute, *An Unhealthy America, The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease*, accessed on the Web at <http://www.chronicdiseaseimpact.com/ebcd.taf?cat=disease&type=emotional> on 7/7/08.

<sup>ii</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, "Mental Illness Exacts Heavy Toll, Beginning in Youth," June 2005.