



SAMHSA Responds to Consumer/Survivor Advocacy and U.S. Congressional Request with a New "Recovery Support" Strategic Initiative

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Washington, DC -- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration/DHHS recently restructured their strategic initiatives, including a new focus area called "recovery support." This change comes after intense advocacy in the fall of 2010, highlighting how none of the initiatives included survivor/consumer voice and leadership, where it seems the Agency has now responded to thousands of constituents and the U.S. Congress. The new initiative appeared recently on the SAMHSA Website and will "partner with people in recovery from mental and substance use disorders" to "promote individual-, program-, and system-level approaches that foster health and resilience; increase permanent housing, employment, education, and other necessary supports; and reduce barriers to social inclusion."

The inclusion of recovery support comes after SAMHSA opened the strategic initiatives for public comment and thousands of survivors, consumers, advocates, and others chimed in to ensure that this important voice and perspective was maintained at all levels of the Agency. Facilitated by U.S. Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX), the Victim Rights and Mental Health Caucus co-chairs issued a letter to Secretary Sebelius expressing their concern. While the new strategic initiative appears to address some of the concerns, the authors of that letter have yet to receive an official response.

"The addition of "recovery support" to SAMHSA's strategic initiative is a step in the right direction, but we can not lose sight of the fact that survivors and consumers must be involved in order for the programs to be effective," commented Representative Poe.

Dan Fisher, consumer advocate and Executive Director of the National Empowerment Center stated "The consumer/survivor community greatly appreciates SAMHSA's response to our request for supporting our genuine participation in continuing to move to a recovery and wellness-based system."

Witness Justice President & CEO Helga Luest, who led the national advocacy effort, shares feelings of appreciation for the shift at SAMHSA. "This is a very big step forward in maintaining the voice and perspective that we know has a

positive impact on program efficacy," commented Luest. "With the state of our economy and national budget, unless something is a stated priority, it risks being cut - and that risk wasn't something the survivor/consumer movement was willing to accept. The collective action of so many constituent groups clearly made a difference, and all those that participated share this accomplishment." Luest reported that members of the Mental Health Liaison Group, where she participates as an advocate, are generally pleased to see SAMHSA add "recovery support" to their strategic initiatives where mental health and trauma survivors have voice and leadership in behavioral health services.

"Real consumer centered care is a key component in the U.S. healthcare reform efforts," remarked David Shern, PhD, President & CEO of Mental Health America. "This is perhaps nowhere more important than in mental health and addictions where consumers' voice and perspectives are often absent. Empowering full participation in meaningful recovery plans is essential if the system is to become truly consumer centric and the effectiveness of care enhanced." The details of how the new "recovery support" initiative will engage effective partnership and collaboration with the consumer and survivor communities have not yet been shared. Survivors/consumers, advocates, organization, and policymakers await action from SAMHSA that brings survivors/consumers back to the table and in real leadership positions.

Witness Justice is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide support and advocacy for survivors of violence and trauma. More than half of the Witness Justice Board of Directors are survivors/consumers. For more information, please visit www.WitnessJustice.org

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