

n 2006, Florida's mental health care system received a grade of C. Three years later, as the need for public mental health services is growing, the state's grade has slipped to a D.

Florida has one of the biggest uninsured populations in the nation, 3.7 million, and Medicaid rolls are swelling with residents hit hard by the nation's economic crisis. At the same time, the state's budget shortfall in 2008 was over \$3.4 billion. The Department of Children and Families (DCF), the agency that provides public mental health care, has been consistently under-funded.

Fourteen offices around the state contract with providers to deliver community mental health services, but typically people must be in crisis to secure services. Meanwhile, a high proportion of the state's scarce inpatient psychiatric beds are used to restore competency for people facing criminal charges. Many people who receive no or little mental health services enter the criminal justice system when they experience a crisis.

"Florida Partners in Crisis," a non-profit collaboration between public officials in the criminal justice system and mental health advocates, has taken bold steps to respond to the crisis in Florida's jails and prisons. It has advocated for the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Reinvestment Grant program, which provides state matching grants to counties for police Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT), mental health courts, and other programs to reduce the criminalization of people with mental illnesses. In addition, the state's Supreme Court justices have taken the lead drafting a plan for targeting intensive mental health services to people who are at the greatest risk of criminal justice system involvement.

Florida has made some progress in including consumers and families in planning and providing services. The state is developing a peer specialist training and certification program. Additionally, Florida has made mental health and substance abuse treatment integration a top priority by instituting a "no wrong door" policy and better integrating care. And, Florida has approximately 30 Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, of varying quality, that strive for fidelity to national standards.

Despite these promising developments, Floridians living with mental illness face uphill battles to get appro-

## **Innovations**

- Expansion of CIT and mental health courts
- Peer specialist training and certification program
- Substance abuse and mental health treatment integration

## **Urgent Needs**

- Cultural competence and workforce development plans
- More inpatient psychiatric beds
- Services for underserved populations

## **Consumer and Family Comments**

- "The [ACT] team has been like a miracle . . . I can't say enough about these wonderful, dedicated people."
- "I am trying to make sure my son does not end up homeless, toothless, jobless, and on the streets."
- "If my mother had not fought with them on my behalf, I most likely would have committed suicide."

priate services. State plans to cover uninsured residents exclude mental health and substance abuse treatment. And, a mental health insurance parity law remains stalled in the legislature. The state has no plans to address cultural competence or its shortage of mental health professionals.

While Florida hoped that Medicaid reform pilot programs in Duval and Broward Counties would increase flexibility and improve outcomes for recipients, a Georgetown University report found that, instead, services have been put at risk. Many managed care plans participating in the pilot programs provide inadequate crisis services, too few providers, and no medication coverage during emergencies.

Florida faces tough choices in the coming years. Although the state Supreme Court and the criminal justice community are standing up for people with serious mental illness, DCF and the Agency for Health Care Administration are not. Instead of adding more prisons and jails, comprehensive mental health services are urgently needed.

Meeting this medical need will require leadership, political will, and sustained investment. It remains to be seen whether the state is up to the task.