

MENTAL ILLNESS: TREATMENT AND SUPPORT

Adopted by Convention Delegates May 1999
Reviewed and deemed relevant November 2017

- WHEREAS,** The California State PTA has declared its commitment to promote the adequate care and treatment of mental illness, and the prevention of teen suicide; and
- WHEREAS,** Mental illness in children and adolescents can lead to substance abuse, suicide, and other self destructive behaviors; and
- WHEREAS,** When left unrecognized and untreated, mental illness often results in significant difficulties with everyday life, including poor school performance, failed interpersonal relationships, loss of employment, and problems with the law; and
- WHEREAS,** With early identification and appropriate intervention, certain childhood mental illness can be effectively treated and the children returned to a path of healthy development; and
- WHEREAS,** Insurance companies and HMOs are not required to provide coverage for care and treatment of mental illness at parity with that provided for other illnesses, and they often impose discriminatory restrictions and limits on mental health care; and
- WHEREAS,** Support groups, usually organized under volunteer leadership to promote education, advocacy, support, and destigmatization, can be of substantial benefit to mentally ill persons and their families: and
- WHEREAS,** Adequate training is needed for the education community, law enforcement and other authorities to help them recognize symptoms of mental illness and how to respond appropriately or assist as needed; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts make available materials, including information from mental health agencies, that promote awareness of issues regarding mental and emotional health and teen suicide, and urge units, councils, and districts to use such materials to promote parent education; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts urge Legislators to support legislation that would require insurance companies and HMOs to include treatment for mental illness at parity with other illnesses; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA encourage the medical community to provide information and resources to the support groups for patients and families of the mentally ill; and be it further

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- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts urge that members of the education community and local law enforcement agencies receive training to ensure that peace officers and educators can recognize symptoms of mental illness and appropriately respond when dealing with persons, especially children and youth, who show signs of mental illness; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA support the appropriation of state and federal funds to expand systems of care for mentally ill children and youth, and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA forward this resolution to the National PTA for consideration by the delegates at the National PTA convention.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Diagnosis and treatment of mental illness has undergone enormous change from the days of Freud and psychoanalysis to the current treatment methods that use a combination of drugs and therapy. Many mental disorders are now known to have a biological or biochemical basis; but despite major advances in pharmacology in recent years, continued research is needed especially in the treatment of mental disorders in children.

Mental illness often begins in childhood, becomes more severe in adolescence and is very difficult to diagnose as the severity of symptoms vary. Many mentally ill persons tend to hide their problems as best they can because there is still a stigma attached to mental illness; and, when their illness is not being successfully managed, the mentally ill are prone to self medicate.

Behaviors associated with some mental disorders make holding a job very difficult if not impossible, and often bring mentally ill persons into conflict with law enforcement and other authorities. Studies have found that the rates of serious mental disorders among youth involved in the juvenile justice system are much higher than among the general population of youth in the community. Because mental illness may not be readily recognizable as a treatable illness it presents a challenge to the entire community, but especially to educators, law enforcement and other authorities, and to the health care system.

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Mental Illness: Treatment and Support – continued

What is needed?

- Greater awareness among the general public of the issues surrounding mental illness, and understanding that it is an illness that like any other illness requires treatment, will help to remove the stigma and contribute to making sure appropriate treatment will be provided.
- Recognition of the signs of mental illness, especially by educators, law enforcement and other authorities, will help to avert many of the difficulties encountered by mentally ill youth.
- Appropriate and timely treatment, including counseling, access to medicine, and hospital inpatient and outpatient care as needed, is essential.
- Requiring insurance companies and HMOs to broaden their coverage to include diagnosis, care and treatment for mental illness at parity with any other illnesses would enable mentally ill patients to receive better and more timely care.
- Support groups can be of enormous benefit to mentally ill persons and their families, especially when they operate with the active cooperation and assistance of medical personnel.

PTA can be a significant force in promoting awareness and understanding of the issues and in encouraging public policy changes that would improve the lives of our mentally ill relatives, friends and fellow citizens. Many notable, creative people, despite having to cope with mental illness, have made great contributions to the world. It is time to remove the stigma associated with mental illness so that ALL of our children can live full, productive lives.