
Messages and Talking Points

Having a consistent, memorable and personal message is key to a successful advocacy effort. You will want to use these messages as often as possible in all of your communication efforts. Leaders and other advocates should add personal stories and examples that illustrate key points.

Key Messages for Advocates

- Having a consistent, memorable message is key to a successful advocacy effort. Use these messages as often as possible. Add your personal story or example that illustrates a key point.
- The costs of cutting the state's mental health care system are devastating individuals, families and our communities.
- Our state's mental health care budget crisis is everyone's problem and its solution is everyone's responsibility.
- We must protect and strengthen our state's mental health care system.
- The costs of untreated mental illness only gets shifted elsewhere -- to emergency departments, schools, police, courts and overcrowded prisons.

Messages

- Mental illness affects all families and treatment works.
- In Vermont 6,000 children and 23,000 adults face serious mental illness.
- You really save lives when you protect mental health care funding.
- More cuts to state mental health care are devastating individuals, families and our communities.
- When state mental health care funds are cut, we all pay even more for the consequences.
- Our state's mental health care budget crisis is everyone's problem and the solution is everyone's responsibility.
- We must protect and strengthen our state's mental health care system – it's a real investment that returns real benefits.

Talking Points

- The face of mental illness isn't some stranger. It's our co-workers, our neighbors, our friends, our families and sometimes ourselves.
- State and local funding for mental health care has never been adequate, so budget cuts now just make a bad situation even worse.
- We know cuts are hitting every state program, but tough choices shouldn't be bad or unfair choices.

- Mental health cuts actually end up costing us all even more-lost jobs and careers, broken families, more homelessness, higher insurance costs, more welfare and much more expensive costs for hospital emergency rooms, nursing homes, schools, police and courts, jails and prisons.
- The governor, state legislators and other officials really need to protect and strengthen mental health care. We need to invest in proven, cost-effective, community-based treatment and services that really promote recovery.
- The state's Medicaid budget, especially, is a lifeline for thousands of people in our state who face mental illness.
- Lives are at stake. Treatment works – if you can get it. Without it, more people will end up hospitalized, in shelters, in nursing home, on the street, in jail or dead.
- Cuts are coming while the need for help is only increasing.
- We've all been hit by the worst economic times and highest unemployment in more than 25 years. Those unemployed workers are reporting symptoms of severe mental illness four times more than people who still have jobs. Four times as many report thoughts of suicide.
- Returning combat veterans are experiencing very high rates of serious mental illness, suicide, addiction, homelessness and incarceration related to posttraumatic stress disorder.
- One in three young adults is uninsured, even though three quarters of all lifetime cases of mental illness occur by age 24.
- Mental health agencies already operate with inadequate resources and have worked hard to cut administrative expenses as well as imposed hiring freezes and added managed-care restrictions. More cuts can only mean deeper cuts in treatment and services.
- Preserving mental health services preserves jobs, keeping people working and well rather than overlooked, marginalized, trivialized, stigmatized and sick.
- Mental illness does not discriminate. It affects adults, children and people of every ethnic, socioeconomic and religious or political background.
- It affects Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike. It can hit anyone at any time, including the families of public officials.
- One out of every four Americans experiences mental illness at some point in his or her life, and 10 percent of children and youth have serious impairments from mental illness that impact their day-to-day lives.
- Please protect all our families and all our communities now. Protect state funding for mental health care. Treatment works. Cuts kill.

Fast Facts:

- The World Health Organization predicts that by 2020, mental illness will be the second leading cause of disability worldwide, after heart disease.

- Major mental disorders cost the nation at least \$193 billion annually in lost earnings alone, according to a new study funded by the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).
- When workers with depression were treated with prescription medicines medical costs declined by \$882 per employee per year and absenteeism dropped by 9 days (Health Economics).
- Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, three-quarters by age 24. Treating cases early could reduce enormous disability, before mental illnesses become more severe.
- One in four adults experiences a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year, including our returning troops. One in ten children has a serious mental or emotional disorder.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for America's youth ages 15-24. More youth and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease combined. The vast majority of those who die by suicide have a mental illness-often undiagnosed or untreated.
- Our jails and prisons are now the largest psychiatric wards in the nation, housing well over 350,000 inmates with serious mental illness compared to approximately 70,000 patients with serious mental illness in hospitals.
- One out of every five community hospital stays involves a primary or secondary diagnosis of mental illness.