

PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Interim Report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Released

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Following introductory remarks by the Commission's executive director, **Claire Heffernan**, the Commission's chair, **Mike Hogan**, addressed the attendees and first pointed to the need for the Commission's work (i.e., suicidal deaths and WHO listing of mental disorders as prime cause of disability). He then noted how the Commission's efforts build on the SG report by supporting the contentions that recovery is possible and that the "so-called mental health system" is fragmented and in disarray. In fact, his transmittal letter to the President at the beginning of the report states that the mental health service delivery system is "in shambles." In this regard, Hogan noted two principles adopted by the group: 1) that this is "not an indictment" of health care providers, but of the financing structure and larger system; and 2) that the burden of limited access and quality of mental health care falls disproportionately on minority populations. The report highlights major barriers to care for children, adults with mental illness, and older adults, the high unemployment and disability rates for adults with serious mental illness, and suicide prevention. Questions posed by the audience concerned changes since the Carter Commission (i.e., more effective treatments and increased fragmentation), the plan for the next six months (sifting thru subcommittee reports to "see what rises to the top") and the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision (need for reasoned and not all-out de-institutionalization). I followed up with Hogan afterwards about mental health training. In the absence of a specific Commission subcommittee addressing this area, he is not sure how it will be handled. I stressed the importance of doing so, which he too recognizes.