



For Immediate Release

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A Year After Gabrielle Giffords: Mental Health in Arizona

Despite cuts to funding, job losses, and cancellation of mental health services in Arizona, Compass Mental Health continues to serve patients in need

PHOENIX, AZ (January 4, 2012) – In the year since the shooting that left six dead and 18 wounded, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Arizona’s mental healthcare industry has faced widespread cuts in funding, job losses, and thousands of seriously mentally ill patients without coverage.

Pressured with a \$1.15 billion deficit, Arizona lawmakers made sweeping cuts in healthcare, with \$50 million slashed in state funding from mental healthcare alone. As a result of these cuts to their funding, hospitals and healthcare agencies were forced to lay off thousands of workers, including hundreds of mental health case workers and counselors.

As 2012 begins, over 12,000 seriously mentally ill Arizonans who don’t qualify for Medicaid are without the healthcare they need most, including access to case management, brand name prescriptions, transportation, housing, and therapy. “Eliminating these programs does not eliminate mental illness in patients. It forces them to give up the treatment they so desperately need, until the patients find themselves in an emergency room or hospitalized.” states Compass Mental Health’s Chief Clinical Officer Dr. Kevin Alexander DBH.

The cuts to the mental health system in Arizona eliminate resources previously in place to help the seriously mentally ill, like the gunman in the Tucson shooting Jared Loughner, and could lead to increased risk of harm to the individuals as well as the community. Jared Loughner was recently found incompetent to stand trial for the crime, after being diagnosed with schizophrenia. Although there is no indication that Loughner had ever been treated in Arizona for mental illness and there is no direct link between mental healthcare cuts and the shooting, it has become increasingly difficult for those in need in our state to receive treatment.

“The programs that were eliminated or limited helped patients who may have the potential to become a danger to themselves or others. Without access to support services such as a case manager, medications, or on-going therapy, patients are more likely to decompensate, leading to increasing symptom presentation and a greater potential for their becoming suicidal or violent toward others,” warns Dr. Alexander. “They are often overlooked by the system until these people experience a crisis event, as was the case with Jared Loughner last year.”

“Most of these crisis events result in these individuals being seen in an emergency department or admitted to a hospital where our agency, Compass, in coordination with the hospital’s treatment team, will provide emergency assessment, intervention, and transitional care throughout the crisis episode,” Dr. Alexander explains. “The only point of care for many patients in need will be emergency services and hospitals. Even these crisis resources are limited for many patients, with the crisis system seeing cuts of its own. These crisis resources will only provide for patch worked patient care, the persistent needs of the seriously mentally ill patients will not be met, and we will see an increase in crisis

episodes. This creates more expense to the system as a whole and leads to greater risk for these patients and the community.”

Compass Mental Health helps Arizonans faced with a mental health emergency. Our emergent care is initiated at the hospital during the crisis event, and maintained post-discharge with aftercare services to support and stabilize the patient. This program is offered at no cost to Valley hospitals. For more information about this program, call Compass at 602-633-6200.

About Compass Mental Health

Compass Mental Health provides emergent mental health and substance abuse services for patients throughout Arizona. Our exceptional psychological services are administered through education, knowledge and insight. Compass’s purpose is to improve the health and independence of individuals, couples and families, with services tailored to meet specific needs. For more information, visit www.compassmentalhealth.com or call 602-633-6200.