



For Immediate Release

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Contact:

Marilyn Cormack, President/CEO
Birmingham Group Health Services, Inc.
435 East Main Street
Ansonia, CT 06401
(203) 736-2601, ext. 310
mcormack@bghealth.org

Barry Kasdan
Bridges...A Community Support System, Inc.
949 Bridgeport Avenue
Milford, CT 06460
203) 878-6365 ext. 327
bakasdan@bridgesmilford.org

Roberta Cook, CEO
Harbor Health Services, Inc.
13 Sycamore Way
Branford, CT 06405
(203) 483-2630 x204
rcook@harborhealth.org

Local Mental Health Providers Receive Ground Breaking 2 Million Dollar Federal Primary Care Grant

Ansonia, CT (December 2009) - CommuniCare, Inc. (CCI) a regional behavioral healthcare partnership between **Birmingham Group Health Services, Inc. (BGHS)** - *Ansonia*; **Harbor Health Services, Inc. (HHSI)** - *Branford*; and **Bridges...A Community Support System, Inc.** - *Milford*, announced today receipt of a ground breaking four-year, two million dollar federal SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant to support primary health care and mental health services integration at each of the CCI partner agencies. The grant, which is one of only 13 awarded across the nation, will help address the serious health care gaps that shorten the life expectancy and quality of life of thousands of adults with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Recent research demonstrates that **individuals with serious mental illness are dying 25 years earlier than the general population**. The prevalence of chronic disease among persons with mental illness, including diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular syndromes is substantially higher as well. In making the announcement of the grant award, CCI partner agency CEOs Marilyn Cormack (BGHS), Barry Kasdan (Bridges), and Roberta Cook (HHSI) stressed that persons with serious mental illness and substance abuse problems are often unable to access timely, responsive and quality health care that is available to the general population. "The primary care integration grant will allow CCI agencies to provide primary medical care for clients who currently do not have access to it, including those who have no regular contact with a primary care provider but have serious health risk factors."

The CCI primary care initiative **is being heralded by Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and Governor Jodi M. Rell**. "I am very pleased that CommuniCare has been awarded these vital funds," said Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. "**This grant will enable our local communities to better address the serious gaps in our current health care system for those with mental health and substance abuse disorders**, who are substantially more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular syndromes. I am proud to see these valuable members of the Connecticut health care community at the forefront of providing the integrated, coordinated primary and mental health care that is so essential to creating a better health care system in America." In a recent letter congratulating CCI members for the initiative and the grant award, Governor Rell wrote, "**We are excited about the timing of the grant and the opportunity it provides for Connecticut to continue its investment towards a recovery-oriented behavioral health system of care**. Your proposal (initiative) clearly meets a priority identified by

the State...ensuring that our citizens with persistent mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders receive timely and effective primary health care in the setting in which they are most comfortable.”

As part of the grant initiative, CCI will be collaborating with the Cornell Scott-Hill Health Corporation (New Haven) to bring medical providers to each of the agencies to provide on-site primary care for clients at least one day per week. The grant will also enable CCI partners to develop comprehensive, integrated mental health and primary care programs that will include medical treatment, wellness education, prevention planning, nutrition counseling and intensive case management. Care at each agency will be provided via an individualized approach that is easily accessible and uniquely sensitive to each population’s complex needs. “In our experience, highly coordinated, integrated behavioral health and primary care services are essential components of care for individuals with behavioral health issues,” said Jamesina Henderson, CEO of The Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center. “The Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center looks forward to a fruitful, long-term collaboration with CommuniCare in caring for our clients together.”

Primary care integration is expected to begin at each CCI agency this winter. For more information about CommuniCare, Inc., the Primary Care Integration Grant, or CCI partner agencies, contact: In Ansonia: Marilyn Cormack, President/CEO, Birmingham Group Health Services, Inc., (203) 736-2601, ext. 310, or visit: www.bghealth.org. In Milford: Barry Kasdan, Bridges...A Community Support System, Inc., (203) 878-6365, or visit: www.bridgesmilford.org. In Branford: Roberta Cook, CEO, Harbor Health Services, Inc., (203) 483-2630, or visit: www.harborhealth.org.

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