

Oregon scores a C+ on mental health services

Oregon’s mental health system for adults squeaked by with an average grade from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in the first state-by-state analysis of the nation’s mental health system in more than 15 years.

Oregon rated a C+, compared with the national average of a D. Still, a C falls short of an acceptable grade for a system designed to help the most vulnerable adults who suffer with mental illness. The full report, *Grading the States: A Report on America’s Health Care System for Serious Mental Illness*, is available at www.nami.org/grades.

“Average gets you very little in Oregon,” said Dave Gallison, executive director of NAMI Oregon, the statewide advocacy group that successfully promoted mental health insurance parity legislation in the 2005 Legislature.

“Average means the Oregon State Hospital is overcrowded and ready to crumble,” Gallison said. “Average means thousands of adults going without treatment and thousands of men and women living on the streets. Average means thousands more put in jails for no other reason than their mental illness went untreated. Average means overburdened hospitals and emergency rooms that aren’t equipped to treat those with mental illness beyond an immediate crisis.”

Connecticut and Ohio received B grades, the highest of

any states. Three other states scored a B-, and three others matched Oregon’s C+.

Oregon was cited for several positive developments, including the passage of mental health insurance parity legislation last year. Under the law, group health insurance plans must treat mental health care benefits on par with physical health benefits beginning January 2007. The law is expected to open access to low-cost and effective treatment services for thousands of adults and children. Currently, most insurance plan place arbitrary limits on mental health care regardless of medical necessity.

Oregon also scored well during a consumer “test drive” in which NAMI members tested access to basic information through the state mental health department’s Website and telephone system. Oregon scored 8 out of 10 points and ranked 14th in the nation.

However, Oregon is lacking in many other areas. The decrepit Oregon State Hospital is the most visible example.

But just as disheartening is Oregon’s lack of a seamless community-based mental health system. For example, housing is woefully lacking for adults with serious mental illness.

Also, two years years after the Governor’s Mental Health Task Force issued its “Blueprint for Action” for Oregon’s mental health system, few of the task force’s recommendations for

improved mental health care have been acted upon.

And funding remains a chronic problem. Oregon’s inability to build a community-based system with a wide array of services results in many Oregonians going without the health care and other services they need to successfully manage their conditions.

With adequate resources, communities across Oregon could respond to the needs of adults with mental illness before they reach a crisis state. “We are creating disability by not investing in effective management services,” Gallison said. “People who could manage their conditions are hitting a crisis that could be easily avoided.”

And once those adults reach a crisis, they add stress to other public systems, such as hospitals and prisons.

“We’re very troubled by the lack of access to care and dis-

mayed by the rising number of people with mental illness ending up in our prisons,” he said. “Oregonians with serious mental illness – and the people who service them – deserve much better.”

With proper services, most people with mental illness can successfully manage their conditions and experience recovery, Gallison said, “We want the governor and state legislators to act now and not pretend that simply throwing money at the state hospital will take care of our problems.”

Grades are based on 39 criteria in four categories. Oregon received a C- for Information Accessibility, A for Infrastructure, C for Services and Be for Recovery Supports. According to the report, Oregon’s “Infrastructure” grade represents the state’s forward-looking orientation based on priorities, innovations, data collection and planning.

Personal safety topic of Chat

Improve Your Personal Safety and Self-defense will be discussed at an Evening Chat on Monday, March 20, from 6-8:00 p.m.

Learn how to be more prepared for those life situations when your personal safety may be at risk. Shawn Scott, a certified safety instructor with PPCT Management Services, Inc., will discuss various safety-related topics, including who may be at greater risk of attack, what works as a first line of defense, strategies for getting away from an attacker, and what people can do to be more prepared.

This free, no registration required discussion will be at the Tuality Health Education Center, 334 SE Eighth Ave., Hillsboro. For more information, call 503-681-1700 or see the website at www.tuality.org.

Free well water testing, March 22 & 29

The Oregon State University Extension Service’s Well Water Program is offering two free clinics at the Columbia County Extension office, 505 N. Columbia River Highway , St. Helens, OR 97051. Clinic dates are Wednesday, March 22 and Wednesday, March 29. Both clinics will be open from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The clinics will provide a nitrate screening of well water, as well as information about well and septic system maintenance.

“It is important for households with pregnant women or newborns to test nitrate levels because of a rare type of blue-baby syndrome,” said Gail Andrews, who directs the Well Water Program. “But is is also something that all residents who have private wells should

be doing.” OSU recommends annual well water testing for nitrates.

Nitrate levels are an indicator or general well health and safety. Nitrate leaches very easily through the soil to groundwater from farms and gardens, septic systems, animal yards, and manure piles. Nitrate above the natural level is an indicator that other chemical contaminants from the surface have the potential of leaching into the groundwater supplying your drinking water. A good time to test for nitrates is:

- If you expect to have a pregnant woman or newborn baby drink the water.
- Once every 1-3 years if you live near: fertilized fields, rural development with septic sys-

tems on one acre or less, pastures or pens with many animals and thinning stands of grass, or a perfect lawn.

• If you have had nitrate above the natural level in the past, test once a year, about the same time of year each time, and keep records.

• Every 3-5 years if you don’t live near a source of nitrate and have never had it show up in a test.

• Whenever you have the opportunity for free nitrate screening at Well Water or other events.

For the free screening, bring a half-cup of untreated well water to the clinic in a clean, water-tight container. Water samples should not be more than one or two days old and should be refrigerated if more than a few hours old. Participants may wait for the results, which take about 15 minutes.

Additional information on the program is available at Extension’s Well Water Program website <http://wellwater.oregonstate.edu>. For more information about the well water testing clinics in St. Helens, contact the Columbia County Extension office at 503-397-3462.



jazzercise

International Movement Screening Day

Location: The First Baptist Church 359 A Street, Vernonia

When: 8:00 a.m. Saturday, April 1, 2006

What: If you love Jazzercise and think it looks like a fun opportunity, please join us! Please wear (Jazzercise) workout attire and bring a bottle of water.

Who: A Jazzercise representative will be screening individuals for an upcoming Jazzercise instructor workshop. We are excited to meet you!

Please RSVP by March 29th, 2006
E-mail Richard Mundy, rmundy@jazzercise.com
or call Penny Costley (503) 429-0196
If you are interested in fitness and the FUN of teaching Jazzercise, please plan to attend. No obligation.

 Cardio
  Strength
  Stretch



“Skills for Life”

Classes for seven weeks.

The first class, on thought, will be held April 5, at 7pm at

Heather’s Health Haven,

56449 Nehalem Hwy. S.

503-429-2564

The public is invited to attend.