

NEWS RELEASE



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NCADD-New Jersey Releases Proposals Aimed at Ending Bias Facing the Addicted and Recovering

TRENTON ... (April 19, 2005) – The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey (NCADD-NJ) today released a collection of recommendations by a panel of legal, medical, and policy experts to address the most common forms of discrimination facing people with an addiction or in recovery from an addiction. The document, “Overcoming Addiction Discrimination,” outlines the panel’s remedies to the inequities addicted individuals face in health care, employment, education and housing. The report can be found at www.ncaddnj.org.

“This report proposes concrete measures to address areas of bias that people with an addiction routinely face,” said John Hulick, NCADD-NJ’s director of Public Affairs and Policy. “For NCADD-NJ, it is particularly rewarding in that it goes to the heart of the agency’s founding principle, which is to uproot the stigma that has long confronted people with an addiction to alcohol or drugs and made their return to well-being that much more difficult.”

Before disbanding, the panel met a last time in early March to refine its proposals. Over the year and half life of the panel, the area to which it devoted the most time and which is covered in the greatest detail in the recommendations is addiction health coverage reform. This issue affects a great many lives in that the limits managed care imposes results in inappropriate treatment or, in many cases, in no care at all due to discriminatory health insurance practices.

One of the proposed steps to remedy the treatment deficiencies is to introduce established assessment and placement criteria for patients with an alcohol or drug problem, such as those used by the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM). Another recommendation concerning coverage for addiction is to provide recourse to health consumers when managed care organizations refuse to honor benefits covering addiction treatment that are written into policies.

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Such relief could be achieved through an ombudsman within the state Office of the Public Advocate.

In terms of employment, the panel cited numerous obstacles in New Jersey barring people who are recovering from an addiction or with a drug possession conviction felony from being able to work. The report notes that laws and practices disqualifying people from employment for past drug use, addiction or alcoholism are contrary to the Americans with Disabilities Act and New Jersey's Law against Discrimination. To inform both individuals and employers of their rights and responsibilities, the panel urged producing a brochure summarizing discrimination laws as those laws relate to people with an active addiction and those in recovery.

Also related to employment is that New Jersey issues no form of restricted driver's license for individuals convicted of a drug conviction, even for those able demonstrate they have not used drugs over an extended period. One panel member, attorney Michael Murphy, noted that the absence of driver's license often makes getting to a job or to recovery support meetings all but impossible, sabotaging the hope of earning a living or sustaining their sobriety.

The members of the Discrimination Panel are: Dr. Louis Baxter, Physicians Health Program; Victor Cappocia, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; Joanne Cole, New Jersey Visiting Nurses Association; Shai Goldstein, the Anti-Defamation League; Deborah Jacobs, American Civil Liberty Union; William Kane, New Jersey Bar Association; Lynn Limato, Friends of Addiction Recovery-New Jersey; Michael Murphy, attorney; Jim O'Brien, Addiction Treatment Providers of New Jersey; Mary Lou Powner, Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse; and Roseanne Scotti, Drug Policy Alliance of New Jersey.

NCADD-NJ has dedicated itself for more than 20 years to educating New Jersey's citizens and decision-makers about alcohol and drug use issues, to advocating on state policies concerning individuals addicted to alcohol or other drugs, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction. More information about the council is available at its website, www.ncaddnj.org.

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