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National Conference to focus on practical, cost-effective ways to better help individuals, communities address mental illness

As communities across the country struggle with the challenge of helping individuals with mental illness - particularly those who haunt our streets and public places - a national conference later this month will focus on best practices for producing positive, cost-effective outcomes.

The program, organized by the Institute for Behavioral Healthcare Improvements with support from the Center for Health Care Services (San Antonio) and the Mental Health Foundation, will feature broad range of presenters with hands-on expertise, whose efforts make impact every day.

“There are no simple solutions for improving mental health practices, just as there are no easy answers for individuals and families struggling with illness everyday,” said Peter Brown, Executive Director of the Institute for Behavioral Healthcare Improvements (IBHI) “But there are proven approaches that improve outcomes when they are applied consistently. We are bringing people together to share practical information about ways we can better help people and communities.”

One example of the complex challenges involving mental health issues is the inappropriate overuse of jails to treat individuals with mental illness. Often individuals are jailed for nuisance crimes because other treatment options are not available. This strains criminal justice resources at a huge cost to taxpayers. It also adds to stigma associated with mental illness and often individuals do not get the help they really need.

The program will be take place at the Hotel Contessa in San Antonio TX, January 29-31. San Antonio’s focused coordination involving advocates, law enforcement and medical providers has been cited as an outstanding community model for proactive outreach. It was recently profiled by the Boston Globe.

The program will feature presentations by Leon Evans, President and CEO of the Center for Health Care Services and other San Antonio area officials who have been

instrumental in changing that region's approach to diverting individuals to appropriate care and treatment. Evans is a member of the IBHI Board of Directors.

Other presenters include:

* Pete Early, author of eleven nonfiction books (including four New York Times bestsellers) and best known for *CRAZY: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness*;

* Hon. Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade Judge - served as Special Advisor on Criminal Justice and Mental Health for the Supreme Court of Florida and helped author the groundbreaking report: *Transforming Florida's Mental Health System*.

* Larke Huang, of the Office of Policy Planning and Innovation, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SMHSA) - a national leader of policy issues affecting children, adolescents and families;

* Regina Huerter, Executive Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Strategies for the City and County of Denver, CO, presenting on the coordination between local programs, providers, criminal justice and other stakeholders.

* Stuart Buttlair, Regional Director of Inpatient Psychiatry and Continuing Care for Northern California Kaiser Permanente and President of the IBHI Board of Directors.

* Ron Manderscheid, Executive Director of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Directors.

A full listing of presenters and programs along with registration information is available at www.ibhi.net.