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National Conference highlights best practices at intersection of Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health

SAN ANTONIO, TX - Experience Based Practices for criminal justice reform provide hope and direction for better addressing the challenge of individuals with mental illness languishing in local jails across the country. First-hand accounts about the intersection of criminal justice and behavioral health were the focus of a recent national conference presented by the Institute for Behavioral Healthcare Improvement.

More than 150 participants engaged in extraordinary sessions filled with up-to-date and actionable information about community collaboration, mental health outreach and jail and emergency room diversion.

Communities across the country are struggling with the challenges - particularly those involving homeless mentally ill people who are forced onto our streets. Lack of appropriate alternative care often means that they end up in jails - usually for nuisance crimes - where they do not receive the help they really need and clog the system at a high cost to taxpayers.

“There is a tremendous opportunity to better address this intolerable situation simply by doing things that we already know can work,” said Stuart Buttlair, Regional Director of Inpatient Psychiatry and Continuing Care for Northern California Kaiser Permanente and President of the IBHI Board of Directors. “The presenters and participants who were at this conference are on the front lines every day seeking better outcomes. There is evidence of progress when a broad range of stakeholders in the community come together to implement approaches that produce better outcomes.”

The Criminal Justice - Behavioral Health Partnership Promoting Integrated Health Care: Creating High Quality Systems for the Hard to Serve -was held in San Antonio to highlight the community collaboration efforts led by IBHI Board member Leon Evans, President and CEO of the Center for Health Care Services, a not-for profit health center based there. A tour of the center’s Restoration Center and the related Haven for Hope, offered a glimpse of the progress that is possible when community partners work together for integrated approaches to services and resources. San Antonio is gaining national attention for his efforts with community-based mental health outreach.

A keynote address by Pete Earley, former Washington Post reporter and author of the best-selling book, *Crazy: A Father’s Search Through America’s Mental Health Madness*, set the tone with a message of determination and hope. That message was reinforced by Miami -Dade Judge Steven Leifman’s

presentation on the continuing reform efforts that he has led in his community that have gained national attention. Both stressed that recovery and progress is possible but not without persistence and bringing a lot people together and keeping them focused on the objectives - it's not easy.

The sessions also included overview on three national initiatives now underway with substantial funding:

- Larke Huang of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offered perspective on the resources committed for distribution under the 21st Century Cures Act;

- Laurie Garduque of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation explained the 20 pilot projects in development for Criminal Justice reform aimed at addressing the issue of diverting individuals with mental illness to appropriate care; and

- Patrick Fleming of the National Association of Counties detailed the Stepping Up initiative and available resources to help reduce the number of people with mental illness in county jails. There are various ways that communities can connect to this initiative and pursue coordinated collaborative efforts, starting with simply building some consensus and resolving to address the issue.

There was also a presentation on the necessity of strategic community collaborative effort by Ron Manderscheid, Executive Director of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Directors, a longtime expert in mental health policy. They are tracking progress, community by community and compiling the data.

Additionally, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, represented by Chief Will Johnson of Arlington, TX, shared perspective on their One Mind Campaign offering guidelines for law enforcement to partner with mental health organizations, promote models for police response to Mental Health incidents, including the use of Crisis Intervention Team training and, minimally, training all officers in mental health first aid. Numerous other presentations offered hands-on perspective on best-practice models that work and can be replicated in communities across the country and an opportunity to share ideas and perspectives.

The conference was sponsored by the Center for Health Care Services, the Mental Health Foundation, Alkermes and Lundbeck.