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MAPP Changes Are One Part of Work Support for People with Mental Illnesses

Madison, WI. Governor Walker today announced a package of changes to support work-related activities. Included in these were proposed changes to the Medicaid Purchase Plan (MAPP), which allows Medicaid recipients with disabilities who return to work to purchase Medicaid coverage when their income exceeds usual Medicaid limits. This is important for people with disabilities because Medicaid provides a benefit package that includes services and supports not typically found in private health insurance plans; services and supports that are critical in allowing the person to work.

Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) was among the groups that has worked with the Department of Health Services (DHS) over the past year to fashion changes to the MAPP program that both reduce disincentives to return to work in the current program and recognize the challenges faced by people with disabilities in making the transition to work. We thank DHS for their commitment to improving the MAPP program and appreciate the Governor including this in his budget.

However, while the changes to MAPP will allow Medicaid recipients to more easily weather the transition to work, they do not in and of themselves provide support in obtaining and maintaining employment. MHA urges the Governor and Legislature to also provide funding for expansion of training on Individualized Placement and Support (IPS), an evidence-based supported work program for people with mental illnesses. DHS, in collaboration with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), currently supports IPS training in limited areas of the state through a grant-funded program. Employment rates for individuals receiving IPS are 50% higher than those for individuals receiving usual DVR services (45% vs. 30% according to data from DHS). The training is provided to staff of existing DVR programs, such as Comprehensive Community Services (CCS-which has expanded as a result of the Governor's 2013 mental health budget initiative). MHA would like to see this training available to programs across Wisconsin.

MHA also wants to underscore that MAPP works because Medicaid works. As noted, the benefits that MAPP offers, such as CCS and personal care, are not part of routine commercial health insurance. With talk of transforming Medicaid to a block grant program MHA is concerned about the integrity of the current Medicaid program and the ability it will have to provide these critical services going forward. Legislators are urged to be mindful of the fact that while people with disabilities represent 25% of Medicaid recipients they account for 64% of the expenditures. Severe cuts to Medicaid spending, which are likely to accompany a block grant, will have a huge impact on this population.

MHA recognizes that work is an important part of recovery for many people with mental illnesses. But there are many pieces that are necessary to support a return to work. MAPP is one, but not the only one.