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National Education and Advocacy Project:

Eliminate Discrimination Against People in Recovery and Expand Public Health Responses to Alcohol and Drug Problems

Despite notable successes by advocates and growing support from policymakers, our nation's policies toward alcohol and drug addiction and people in recovery remain woefully inadequate. Nearly 20 million people who need treatment for alcohol and drug problems – 84% of the 23.5 million people suffering from this illness – do not receive care. Effective prevention strategies are terribly under-funded and under-utilized. People in recovery often are discriminated against as they seek employment, insurance, and other necessities of life. These policy failures cost us many thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in health and social costs, crime, and lost productivity.

The Legal Action Center (LAC) and State Associations of Addiction Services (SAAS) (others may join) believe that the time is right to work with the recovery community and other advocates to plan and launch a new, multi-year project to educate policymakers and advocate for public policy reform to achieve two goals:

1. **Eliminate discrimination in laws and policies against people in recovery from addiction who are fully qualified for employment, insurance, housing, and life's other necessities.**
2. **Expand and improve public health responses to addiction, including the full continuum of treatment, recovery, and prevention services, and research.**

Achieving these goals will move our country forward by promoting recovery, reducing the spread of this terrible illness, improving and expanding the treatment and prevention systems, and increasing our knowledge about all aspects of the problem. The American public strongly supports these goals: a 2004 Hart poll found that 81% of the public would be more likely to vote for candidates who support more funding for public health responses to addiction and 76% would be more likely to vote for those who seek to prohibit health insurers from discriminating against people in need of alcohol and drug treatment.

The project will work to achieve these policy reforms by bringing together a wide array of advocates, employing state-of-the-art media and electronic communications, and utilizing groundbreaking research that has greatly advanced scientific understanding of addiction and the best ways to prevent and treat it.

Please become a partner by making a minimum three to five year commitment to this exciting, long overdue campaign! Partners receive regular updates, legislative alerts, and private briefings on issues of special concern to them...and, most important, the satisfaction of being part of a national campaign to eliminate discrimination and reduce the human, economic, and social costs of addiction. We hope you will join us!

Stage One of the Project: Dramatically Expanding Our Advocacy

While our eventual goal is to work with the recovery community, national and state organizations, and other advocates to jointly launch a major new campaign, LAC and SAAS (others may join) will begin by dramatically expanding our advocacy both in Washington, D.C. and in states around the country. We will:

Create a National Advisory Board (and State Advisory Boards) to Guide and Raise the Profile of the Project

We will recruit dedicated and influential individuals around the country, including former public officials, clergy, business and labor, service providers and consumers, and advocates, to create a National Advisory Board that will enhance the project's credibility and visibility. Many will be in recovery or family members. We also will assist those states that wish to create their own Advisory Boards.

Develop a National Plan for Comprehensive Policy Reform to Eliminate Discrimination Against People in Recovery and Expand Public Health Responses to Addiction

Our plan will include both long-term goals – elimination of all unfair discriminatory barriers and dramatic expansion of availability and quality of treatment, recovery, and prevention services and research – and more immediate legislative goals, including:

- Expand treatment, recovery, and prevention to serve veterans and others who have been left behind and address increases in methamphetamine and prescription drug misuse
- Enact Second Chance Act to begin rolling back discrimination based on previous criminal histories
- Enact parity and managed care reform so those with insurance can obtain the alcohol and drug treatment they need

We will seek to publicize the plan widely and meet with Presidential candidates and the newly elected 110th Congress to discuss its recommendations.

Dramatically Expand Advocacy in Washington, D.C. and Around the Country

We will expand our advocacy at the federal level to achieve the goals set forth in our Plan by:

- Adding an additional staff member to expand our impact on Capitol Hill
- Working in coalition with groups across the political spectrum, including law enforcement, business and labor, communities of color, and faith community
- Identifying and linking with many more “grasstops” (key contacts) across the country: our initial goal will be to identify three key contacts for each member of the Congressional leadership, then eventually all members of Congress

- Strengthening links with grass roots advocates around the country

We will work with state and local advocates to:

- Expand prevention to deter more young people from beginning to use alcohol and drugs and expand treatment to serve those who have been left behind
- Remove unfair statutory roadblocks based on past criminal or addiction histories that prevent qualified people in recovery from obtaining employment, government benefits, housing, and other necessities of life.

Develop and Implement a Communications Strategy

The project will utilize state-of-the-art strategies, including polling and focus groups, media outreach, web sites, and electronic weekly newsletter and alerts, to promote our public policy goals and reforms. We will seek media coverage, editorials, op-eds, and letters to the editor in national and influential local print and electronic media in support of our Plan's policy reforms. We will have a "rapid response" component to capitalize on opportunities in leading outlets around the country to publicize the project's goals and proposed reforms.

Research and experience have identified several promising messages (consistent with the Partnership for a Drug Free America's "Hope. Help. Healing" campaign), including:

- Addiction is a disease that affects one in ten Americans, and one in four American children are affected by parents or family members with an addiction.
- Recovery is a reality. Recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs takes time, patience and, support, and we can never give up on helping family members and friends reclaim their lives.
- Breaking the cycle of addiction is critical to a healthy society. It is easier and less costly to prevent addiction or treat it early.
- Helping people achieve long-term recovery saves society money by reducing the costs of health care, incarceration, crime, and the toll on families.
- Discrimination against people in recovery in employment, housing, education, and health care is unfair and makes recovery more difficult to achieve. Policies should help, not hurt, people who are in recovery and working to improve their lives.

Fundraising

LAC and SAAS will need resources to conduct this important project. Our plan is to identify wealthy individuals and corporate sponsors willing to make three to five year commitments. LAC's goal is to raise at least \$500,000 per year for five years. State associations also will need additional resources to expand their direct and grassroots advocacy.

Work with Recovery Advocates and National and State Organizations to Plan a Major Joint Campaign

Even as we take these important first steps to dramatically expand our advocacy, we will continue working with the recovery community and other organizations around the country to plan a major campaign that we hope all will join.