

# Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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Vol. XII No. 14

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11/28/07

## Where the HART is . . .

### *Cosponsors Needed for Homeless Health Services Bill*

*The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls your attention to H.R. 4129, the Homeless Access to Recovery through Treatment (HART) Act, which will reauthorize, strengthen and improve existing mainstream addiction and mental health services programs and targeted homeless programs operated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This legislation has been endorsed by the National Council and other organizations and warrants support from Mobilizer readers.*

### **Homelessness, Addiction and Mental Health**

People experiencing homelessness have historically had very poor access to mental health and addiction services. Addiction and mental illness – often co-occurring – lead to and prolong homelessness and tend to be exacerbated by the experience. Among surveyed homeless people, 39% report some form of mental health problem, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that 20-25% meet criteria for serious a mental illness. In addition, at least 38% of homeless Americans have an alcohol problem, and 26% report problems with other drugs.<sup>1</sup>

Health Care for the Homeless projects provide addiction and mental health services as part of their comprehensive approach to primary care, using the approximately \$200 per patient per year provided in their grants from HRSA; HCH projects try to supplement the limited HRSA grants with other funding sources, including occasional grants from SAMHSA programs like PATH and THP (see below). However, SAMHSA has not used the HCH infrastructure systematically to reach the 700,000 persons for whom HCH provides care each year.

### **Mainstream Programs and HART**

On November 8, H.R. 4129, the *Homeless Access to Recovery through Treatment Act (HART) Act*, was introduced in the House of Representatives with bipartisan support from Representatives Hilda Solis (D-CA), Jim Ramstad (R-MN), and Julia Carson (D-IN). The bill would expand SAMHSA by designating homeless individuals as a *priority population* – thus giving them admission preference not only to the targeted programs, but also to “mainstream” treatment facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> “Homelessness – Provision of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*. March 2003.

The bill also addresses the growing problem of improper hospital discharges by requiring inpatient facilities that receive SAMHSA funds to establish a discharge plan that ensures patients are placed in stable, appropriate housing.

## **Targeted Programs – PATH & THP – in HART**

Two programs of historic importance to organizations serving people without homes – Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) and Treatment for Homeless Persons (THP) – would be reauthorized and expanded by H.R. 4129. And for both programs, the legislation includes language listing HCH projects among the entities most deserving of programmatic resources. As *Mobilizer* readers know, Health Care for the Homeless projects are required to provide substance abuse services as a condition of their grants, but never have been provided the resources to do so most effectively. Given that HCH projects have the infrastructure - but often not the operating dollars - to provide these services to homeless individuals and families, PATH and THP resources would be utilized in a cost-effective manner by HCH providers.

### **ACTION:**

*Since the introduction of the HART Act in the House of Representatives, advocates have worked to increase co-sponsorship and to secure the introduction of a Senate companion bill. The National Council encourages Members of Congress to prioritize homeless individuals and families for mental health and addiction services by signing on as a cosponsors of the HART Act.*

- **Read the National HCH Council's 2007 policy statement on addiction and mental health** at <http://www.nhchc.org/Advocacy/PolicyPapers/AddictionMentalHealth2007.pdf>
- **Read the HART Act, HR 4129**, at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
- **Contact your Congressional Representatives to urge them cosponsor the HART Act (H.R. 4129).** Tell your Members or their health staffers that the bill addresses the addiction and mental health needs of homeless individuals and families through improved hospital discharge planning and increased funding for the PATH and THP programs. If you must leave a voice message, be sure to reference the bill number—**H.R. 4129**. Tell your Representative or their health staffer to contact Representative Hilda Solis's DC office to be added as a cosponsor. Find your Representative at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.
- **For more information** contact the National Council's Health Policy Organizer, Adrienne Breidenstine, at [abreidenstine@hchmd.org](mailto:abreidenstine@hchmd.org) or call 443-703-1337.

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