



STATE OF WISCONSIN
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
BARBARA LAWTON

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Contact: Larry J. Martin, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, (608) 266-3516

Lt. Governor Lawton Joins Wisconsin Effort to End Discrimination Associated With Mental Illness

MADISON – Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton announced today that she has joined statewide efforts to fight stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness that thousands of Wisconsin residents face every day. Lawton has agreed to become an Honorary Chairwoman for Wisconsin United for Mental Health, a coalition of public and private organizations, and will help launch a national public awareness campaign in the state.

Wisconsin is initiating a multimedia public education campaign to fight stigma. The campaign, Mental Health: It's Part of All Our Lives, includes television and radio public service announcements and print media in English and Spanish. Wisconsin is among eight states working with the Elimination of Barriers Initiative, a three-year project established by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The initiative seeks to educate the public that mental illnesses are common that they affect nearly every family across the nation, and that recovery is possible.

“Mental illness is treatable. Wisconsin residents need to understand that effective treatments and supports for mental illness exist,” said Lieutenant Governor Lawton. “Stigma, fear, and discrimination stand in the way of recovery, making it harder for people to access services, find employment, or obtain housing. Fortunately, everyone can do something to help reduce stigma.”

Television public service announcements are to be released at the end of July in all eight participating states. Radio and print public service announcements will follow. The other states participating with Wisconsin include California, Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The public service announcements feature persons who have experienced mental illness, and the materials emphasize the key contributions that people with mental illnesses make.

Wisconsin United for Mental Health is coordinating the statewide efforts in partnership with mental health consumers, family members, advocates, providers, the Department of Health and Family Services, and several mental health organizations. Message themes and resource materials have been developed for three different audience groups, specifically: the general public, the business community, and schools.

In 2003, the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health released a report, *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*. The Commission's first recommendation in this report was to advance and implement a national campaign to reduce the stigma of seeking care. According to federal officials, an estimated 22 to 23 percent of the U.S. population experiences a mental disorder in any given year. However, almost half of these individuals do not seek treatment due to shame, fear, and lack of health coverage.

Wisconsin United for Mental Health is a coalition of organizations working together to increase awareness about mental illness and to promote recovery. These anti-stigma efforts include engaging consumers and family members as spokespersons. Wisconsin United for Mental Health was first launched in 2002.

"Our mission for Wisconsin United for Mental Health is to eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness through educating people that mental illness is real, common, and treatable," said Nino Amato, Co-chair. "News reporting and the media can play an important role in breaking down stereotypes and stigma, which is why this effort is so important."

Additional information about mental illness can be found on the Department of Health and Family Services' Web site at: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>, or the Wisconsin United for Mental Health's Web site at: www.wimentalhealth.org. For more information about the U.S. Health and Human Services' efforts surrounding mental illness and substance abuse, visit www.allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov.