

Association urges Congress to try again in the New Year

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The National Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors is expressing its regret over the removal of Mental Health Parity from the Labor-HHS 2002 Appropriations Bill. If passed the Mental Health Parity would have opened doors for treatment of many Americans with mental illnesses. NAADAC regrets that people with substance abuse problems are not covered under Mental Health Parity. Instead, a major obstacle was created in efforts to fight many serious diseases, and end the discrimination associated with them.

Not passing the bill hurts patients in three major ways. The absence of the bill:

- Discriminates against a group of people with biological brain disorders like Schizophrenia, and depression.
- Will now usher in an increase of pain and suffering for families of patients because of inadequate healthcare and lack of funding to get appropriate help.
- May cause people with serious mental health problems to go undiagnosed, and therefore untreated.

"You can't have Substance Abuse Parity without first having Mental Health Parity," said John L. Avery, Director of Public Policy and Practice with NAADAC. "These are illnesses of a single organ system - the brain."

Currently, people who are covered by insurance for medical conditions are not covered for mental illnesses. To the same degree, those with addiction and dependency problems often have the most inadequate treatment benefits.

"While we are disappointed by the defeat in conference, and look forward to the day when we can extend full parity covering the chemical abuse and dependency codes in the DSM4R, this is a serious enough issue that we will not give up the fight, and hope that something will be passed in the next session," said John L. Avery.

NAADAC sees this as a temporary defeat. We are determined now, more than ever, to continue to work towards making this bill fair, and balanced for the patients, employers, and insurance companies. However, our first concern will always be the safety, and health of those

with alcohol, and drug abuse problems.

If you are interested in speaking to someone about this or any substance abuse topic, or if you wish to schedule an interview with anyone from NAADAC, please contact Rhonda A. Davis, Director of Public Affairs.