

NAADAC, State Affiliates, and You!

By Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, NAADAC Executive Director

Advocacy is in the addiction professionals blood; as addiction professionals, we know that our clients are the most vulnerable, least protected, and most discriminated against due to their disease, and that many other community leaders, legislators and public do not want to recognize substance use disorders as a disease. We see this stigma evidenced every day in one form or another, from lack of insurance coverage for substance use disorder treatment, to the difficulties clients face gaining employment or re-employment, to child protective services lack of evidence-based supports to parents suffering from the disease, and to the criminal justice system's untherapeutic regard for 85% of the incarcerated population having substance use-related issues. NAADAC's Code of Ethics (Principle III, Sections 29 – 32) addresses advocacy directly, stating,

“Providers shall be advocates for their clients in those settings where the client is unable to advocate for themselves. Addiction Professionals are aware of society’s prejudice and stigma towards people with substance use disorders, and willingly engage in the legislative process, educational institutions, and public forums to educate people about addictive disorders and advocate for opportunities and choices for our clients. Addiction Professionals shall advocate for changes in public policy and legislation to improve opportunities and choices for all persons whose lives are impaired by substance use disorders. Addiction Professionals shall inform the public of the impact of substance use disorders through active participation in civic affairs and community organizations. Providers shall act to guarantee that all persons, especially the disadvantaged, have access to the opportunities, resources, and services required to treat and manage their disorders. Providers shall educate the public about substance use disorders, while working to dispel negative myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions about substance use disorders and the people who have them.”

On April 10-11, 2019, NAADAC Leadership, lead by our President, Diane Sevening, and our NCC AP Chair, Jerry Jenkins, worked with other NAADAC national and state leaders and other members and constituents of NAADAC to communicate NAADAC's priorities and concerns to legislators and their staffs on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to bring awareness of persons with substance use disorders and their specific needs, as well as NAADAC's efforts to address those needs and the needs of the professionals who serve them! We advocated for public policy change in insurance reimbursement and protections with the enforcement of parity, for the increase of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Block Grant and the allocation of funds to the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, tuition support for addiction professionals, and funding of the Minority Fellowship Program. Without our leaders from their various states educating their specific legislators, the power in the message is lost. It is vital that your legislators hear from you personally, with your stories of client successes and the reasons why some of your clients are unable to achieve recovery, and that in the absence of enough treatment services, more people will die.

Your work at the state level, fueled by NAADAC support when helpful, can push a bill or funding request to the finish line! NAADAC has partnered with many of our states this year to support credentialing protection from other disciplines working to get their foot in the door of addiction practice without

any training in addiction-specific pharmacology, counseling skills, and practice. We have worked with our state affiliates to squash those bills or change them to be less harmful to our addiction specific practice. States such as Washington, Wyoming, California, North Dakota, and others have felt the “heat” of other disciplines pushing for the ability to administer addiction treatment with less education and training or no education and training. Your voice telling how your addiction specific training, education and practice makes a difference to the clients you serve and the efficacy of services rendered due to these discipline-specific competencies is what is needed in those state and national legislative rooms. Several of these state bills came up with little warning, but NAADAC was able to be responsive and send letters of support with supporting documents to articulate the national addiction scopes of practice, the specific training needed, and education, levels required to provide appropriate evidence-based and effective treatment. Together, NAADAC and the state leadership presented persuasive materials, evidence, and arguments to that allowed us to prevent what could have been a disastrous law for our addiction counselors and the clients they serve.

NAADAC is working with Polsinelli, our government relations firm, and our public policy advisors, Tim Casey and Julie Shroyer, to develop strategies to take to the Hill and language to create and place in legislation that will articulate in legislative language our initiatives and cause change that acknowledges the needs of our clients and our counselors/professionals. Part of the education we promote is the SAMHSA-NAADAC Addiction Professional Education & Career Ladder developed by NAADAC, accepted by partner national addiction organizations, and adopted by and promoted through SAMHSA. NAADAC is working to promote portable national credentials for the benefit of our clients, who move from state to state, and for our counselors, who to move across state lines and find themselves no longer to practice in the new state due to draconian laws or rules that prohibit the recognition of other state addiction credentials. With the advent and growth of telehealth, it will become more imperative that states adopt and accept portable credentials based on the SAMHSA-NAADAC Addiction Professional Education & Career Ladder.

Together, we can build a unified state and national voice that builds on the principles of our Code of Ethics and NAADAC legislative initiatives and that works consistently and tenaciously to support our clients and professionals, as well as the health and wellness of individuals, families, and communities across the nation! Please join NAADAC and NCC AP and make a difference in your community, state, nation and around the world!

Blessings, Cynthia

REFERENCES

SAMHSA-NAADAC Addiction Professional Education & Career Ladder, Updated September 2018.



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and has worked as an addiction professional for over 35 years. She has been a trainer in Domestic Violence/Anger Management and Conflict Resolution for over 25 years as well as an international, national and state trainer in a variety of topics. Moreno Tuohy is also a curriculum writer in addiction screening and evaluation, counseling methods, conflict resolution, co-occurring disorders, and medicated assisted treatment and recovery, and has written articles published in national and other trade magazines. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and is certified both nationally and in Washington State.