



Division of Behavioral Health Services

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An Open Letter to the Behavioral Health Community December 29, 2004

A Maricopa County Superior Court judge recently agreed to the Arizona Department of Health Services' completion dates for the 23-year-old class action lawsuit, *Arnold vs. Sarn*. The lawsuit covers over 17,200 individuals with a Serious Mental Illness in Maricopa County, which is approximately 13% of all individuals served in Arizona. This long awaited plan is extremely important because it provides a clear focus to meet the requirements of previous court orders including:

- Dates certain for service development for both the priority and non-priority populations. For example, by June 2007, we will expand community living arrangements for 300 individuals who have resided in supervisory care homes and by June 2008, 80% of all class members' needs will be substantially met according to their service plan.
- Reasonable expectations for funding requests by the Department and the Governor.
- And finally, success in the short term, including plans for disengagement from the lawsuit for several requirements already met.

The plan is consistent with our overall system development goal of creating a **recovery-based system** by increasing the involvement of consumers and their families, improving the assessment and service planning process, increasing access to services and strengthening the quality management processes to ensure continual improvement.

While many of the actions will occur at the ValueOptions' clinics, the improvements described in the plan will require efforts by the entire Maricopa County behavioral health community. In order for the plan to be successful, it will require increased coordination and collaboration with provider agencies who offer the entire range of covered services, including peer and family support, rehabilitation services, housing, residential, counseling and other programs. To achieve goals outlined in the plan, increased provider participation in assessment and service planning is needed. Equally important is rapid access to services when service needs are identified.

The first set of formal measures of progress in achieving the plan's objectives will occur in April 2005. However, the Department of Health Services and ValueOptions are taking measurements on a weekly basis to determine improvement. As a result of these measurements, specific actions will be required on the part of ValueOptions and Maricopa County providers. For example, based on our analysis of unmet needs, several providers have already assigned staff to each of the five-targeted clinics to increase the availability of substance abuse services.

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I particularly want to stress the importance of the *Report on Consumer, Family and Advocate Issues* filed by the Plaintiffs and the Department's response. This is the outgrowth of an unprecedented collaboration among consumers, providers, and advocates who have worked tirelessly to shape a reform plan that focuses on recovery-based treatment. I am looking forward to continued collaboration as we move forward to make this plan a reality.

I am very excited about bringing closure to this lawsuit, but more importantly, I am excited about improved services and outcomes that this plan offers for Arizonans with behavioral health disorders and their families.

Our focus throughout this effort has been the mental health consumer. We have made a promise to improve their lives through dramatic changes, and we are committed to carrying out that promise.

The specific requirements and timelines for the plan are located on the Department's website at <http://www.azdhs.gov/bhs/index.htm>. I invite you to review the plan and identify the role that you can play to make this plan successful.

Sincerely,



Leslie Schwalbe
Deputy Director