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NAMI North Carolina Recognizes Mental Illness Awareness Week by Urging Congress to Protect Mental Health from 'Supercommittee' Deficit Cuts

Deep Cuts to Medicare & Medicaid Could Jeopardize Health of Millions North Carolinians Living with Mental Illness

RALEIGH, N.C. (Oct. 5, 2011) As part of Mental Illness Awareness Week, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) North Carolina today urged Congress to reject cuts to Medicare and Medicaid that could jeopardize the health of millions of North Carolinians living with mental illness.

The Congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, or "supercommittee,"—created by the recently passed federal debt ceiling legislation—is charged with recommending an additional $1.2 trillion in deficit cuts by November 23. All health care programs are potentially at risk for cuts, and Medicaid and Medicare may be prime targets.

"Mental Illness Awareness Week takes on a special significance this year as Congress debates spending cuts that could hurt millions of North Carolinians living with mental illness," said Deby Dihoff, Executive Director of NAMI North Carolina. "Medicare and Medicaid make it possible for many people to get the essential treatments and medications they need. If the Supercommittee recommends deep cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, we will be putting our most vulnerable citizens at risk."

"There is no doubt that we need to reduce federal spending, but disenfranchising the elderly and underprivileged won't solve the deficit crisis," continued Dihoff. "Medicare and Medicaid provide preventative care by allowing patients to avoid more serious, and costly, conditions. Medicare Part D, for example, annually reduces federal spending by $12 billion by giving elderly Americans access to medications that keep them out of the emergency room. Without Medicare Part D, many seniors would have to forego their prescriptions altogether—resulting in a greater burden on taxpayers for reactive healthcare."

NAMI and 25 other national advocacy groups sent a letter to members of the congressional supercommittee. The letter urges members to protect Medicare—specifically the prescription drug benefit known as Part D—as they look for ways to reduce federal spending before the November deadline.

Medicare Part D gives more than 29 million Americans access prescription drugs at prices they can afford. Before the creation of Medicare Part D in 2006, many treatments were too expensive for as much as a third of the elderly population. A recent Harvard Medical School study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that the improved access to

medications under Medicare Part D actually saves Medicare $12 billion each year. According to the study, Part D has reduced other healthcare expenses—especially costly inpatient care—by about 10 percent per patient. While other healthcare costs continue to increase dramatically, Medicare Part D actually reduces health care expenditures.

For more information about deficit reduction efforts and what they mean for people living with serious mental illnesses, visit: http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=Policy_News_and_Alerts&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=124798.

About NAMI North Carolina

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) North Carolina is a grassroots non-profit organization providing support, education and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses and their families and friends. We are governed by a Board of Directors elected by membership and are 501(c)(3) accredited. NAMI NC is a part of NAMI which has over 210,000 members in 1,200 affiliates across the country. For more information, please visit www.naminc.org.

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