

## The U.S. Medical Assistance Program's Mental Health Initiative: A New Resource for the Uninsured and Underinsured with Mental Illness

### Background

Mental illness is a significant and widespread problem in the United States – nationally, 42.5 million adults experienced a mental illness in the past year, with 9.6 million adults coping with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI). People with mental illness are twice as likely to be poor and uninsured as compared to the general population. Those who lack insurance have difficulty accessing treatment and needed medications and are thus at an increased risk of hospitalization, poor health outcomes and diminished quality of life.

The Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) sector is the public mental health system for people covered by Medicaid and Medicare as well as the uninsured, serving more than 8 million people with mental illness. CMHCs are largely publicly-funded nonprofits that provide medication management and counseling; some also provide primary care services to help meet the full range of their patients' health care needs. Currently, CMHCs receive little to no support from humanitarian aid organizations and rely primarily on pharmaceutical patient assistance programs (PAP) and low-cost generics for uninsured patients whose conditions require medication. While these options help, they are not a total solution – some patients do not qualify for PAP or are unable to complete the extensive paperwork required to enroll and others are unable to afford \$5 generic medications. Adherence to medication therapy, and thus symptom-reduction and enhanced functioning, increase when people with mental illness are able to leave a psychiatric visit with medicine in hand.

### Mental Health Initiative Overview

The U.S. Medical Assistance Program at AmeriCares is the leading provider of donated medicine, vaccines, medical supplies and hygiene products to the U.S. health care safety net. The program has a network of more than 800 partners that together operate in more than 2,000 sites across all 50 states, serving 5 million patients per year. AmeriCares U.S. partners span the full spectrum of the U.S. health care safety net, including free and charitable clinics, community health centers, a limited number of community mental health centers, rural health

centers, county health departments, nonprofit hospitals and charitable pharmacies.

With proven experience in building a U.S. partnership network and increasing the provision of donated medicine throughout the country to the safety net sector, AmeriCares is well-positioned to launch a new resource for CMHCs and the mental health safety net, the U.S. Medical Assistance Program's Mental Health Initiative (MHI).

Under the MHI, AmeriCares will develop a new partner network comprised solely of CMHCs and other nonprofit mental and behavioral health providers. AmeriCares will support the network with donations of psychiatric and primary care medicine for distribution to patients that cannot afford their prescriptions. This will enable more low-income, uninsured and underinsured people to access the medicine they need. AmeriCares will work with its existing pharmaceutical partners and seek out new pharmaceutical donors to develop and secure new psychiatric medications to support this effort.

### Mental Health Initiative Rollout

The MHI will be launched in May 2015 as a 10-state pilot demonstration in the first year. The ten states selected to participate in the year-one pilot are: Illinois, Wisconsin, Colorado, Iowa, California, Texas, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma and Virginia. Results from the demonstration will inform the development of a national MHI, expanding efforts to the larger mental health safety net throughout the U.S.

By delivering medical products as in-kind donations, the MHI will enable resource-constrained mental health safety net organizations to deliver additional health care services by providing critical budget relief, reducing out-of-pocket expenses for clients and expanding treatment options available to those they serve. In fiscal year 2014, AmeriCares made nearly 4,700 deliveries of aid valued at approximately \$85 million to its ongoing U.S. partners.

### Partner Eligibility Criteria

To become an AmeriCares partner of the MHI, institutions have to meet all of the following eligibility criteria:

- Nonprofit mental or behavioral health care facility;
- Serve patients who are uninsured or underinsured and whose income is  $\leq 300\%$  of the federal poverty level; and
- Employ inventory management procedures to maintain supply chain integrity, track the distribution and usage of AmeriCares donated products, and ensure these products are provided only to eligible patients.

### Partnership Application and Agreements

Partners of AmeriCares MHI go through the following vetting and qualification process:

1. Complete an online application;
2. Complete a phone assessment with an AmeriCares staff member;
3. Provide copies of medical and facility related licenses; and
4. Sign an annual Partnership Agreement and Medical Professional Agreement of Responsibility.

The application and agreement process documents how each partner satisfies the eligibility criteria requirements and also further ensures that all partners are fully informed of and agree to adhere to all product donation requirements, the most critical of which include:

- Partners agree to not charge for, sell, trade or return donated products for credit;
- Partners agree to segregate donated products to ensure they are given only to eligible patients;
- When preparing to dispose of expired products, partners agree to segregate donated products to prevent any chance of return for credit;
- If segregation systems are not in place, partners agree to adhere stickers provided by AmeriCares to each container of medicine to distinguish them from products that were not donated and further ensure their proper segregation, dispensing or destruction; and

- Partners agree to participate in the U.S. Medical Assistance Program's Supply Chain Audit to review their storage, use and destruction of products donated by AmeriCares.

### Ongoing Partnership Process

- The U.S. Medical Assistance Program sends out a weekly email to partners with active agreements to inform them of the products that are available for order.
- Partners that wish to place an order log into AmeriCares USAccess web site where they can place an order for products in the quantities they need.
- All orders are reviewed by AmeriCares staff before shipment to ensure that donor requirements are met and that donated products are distributed equitably among the partnership network.
- AmeriCares ships all products to partners at no cost to partners.

#### About AmeriCares

AmeriCares is a emergency response and global health organization committed to saving lives and building healthier futures for people in crisis in the United States and around the world.

AmeriCares U.S. Medical Assistance Program is the largest provider of medical aid to the U.S. health care safety net, last year delivering \$85 million in medicine and supplies to a network of more than 2,000 clinics and health centers serving 5 million patients in need.