



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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## **Behavioral Health Advocates and Leaders “Rally at the Capitol”**

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** — Hundreds of mental health and substance abuse service recipients, advocates, experts and political leaders will join forces today at the front of the Old Capitol for a "Rally at the Capitol" as part of Florida's fifth annual Behavioral Health Day. The rally is designed to shine a spotlight on behavioral health issues and educate Florida legislators and policy leaders on the high cost of further cuts to community-based mental health and substance abuse services.

Advocates say proposed budget cuts will burden Florida's communities, prison system and hospitals. These individuals are here today to ask their legislators to continue funding these services.

“Without DCF funding, crisis stabilization units for citizens at risk of suicide, residential treatment programs for citizens requiring long-term care and vital programs that pay for essential medications to stabilize severe mental illnesses will all be terminated,” said Bob Sharpe, president and CEO of the Florida Council for Community Mental Health (FCCMH). “With nowhere for the severely mentally ill to turn for help, the state will experience an increase in expensive hospital emergency room admissions, forensic commitments, jail admissions, prison incarcerations and homeless individuals who could pose a danger to themselves and their communities.”

Currently Florida is serving only 18 percent of children and 42 percent of adults in need of publicly-funded mental health treatment and ranks 49th among the states. Gov. Rick Scott's budget proposal supports continuing DCF funding due to the increase in costs to prisons, jails and hospitals when front-end treatment is no longer available. However, both the Florida Senate and House have proposed deep cuts that would eliminate the majority, if not all, of the funding available from both DCF and Medicare that is currently dedicated to providing community mental health and substance abuse services around the state.

Speakers at the Rally are expected to include: David Wilkins, Secretary of the Department of Children and Families (DCF); Clint Rayner, Chief of DCF's Office of Consumer and Family Affairs; Bob Sharpe, President and CEO of FCCMH; Mark Fontaine, Executive Director of the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association (FADAA); Robert Whitney, Executive Director of Disability Rights Florida; and Jim Winarski, Board Chair of the Florida Peer Network. Each will provide information on how potential cuts will negatively impact various areas of Florida's communities.

Other Behavioral Health Day events include:

- NAMI Walk: 10 a.m., starting at the Old Capitol
- Behavioral Health Day Reception: 5:30 – 7 p.m., 22nd floor of the Capitol
- Legislator visits by advocates: throughout the day

Behavioral Health Day is sponsored by: FCCMH, FADAA, Disability Rights Florida, Florida Partners in Crisis, the Florida Peer Network and NAMI Florida.

FCCMH is a statewide association of 63 community-based mental health and substance abuse agencies that provide comprehensive services to adults and children throughout Florida. For more information, visit [www.fccmh.org](http://www.fccmh.org).