



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

SUPPLEMENTARY SECURITY INCOME IS IMPORTANT IN PREVENTING SECONDARY DISABLING CONDITIONS OF THE MENTALLY ILL

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program plays an important role in preventing and ameliorating disability and secondary disabling conditions for persons who are severely mentally ill.

A congressional briefing was held on the efforts of states to coordinate activities related to the transition of young adults (between the ages of 18 and 26) with serious mental illness to self-sufficient community life. The briefing was attended by congressional staff.

Summary

According to a recent General Accountability Office (GAO) report, there are 2.4 million youth in the U.S. with serious mental illness (SMI) who are transitioning into adulthood, and the American Psychological Association (APA) puts that number at approximately 3 million. The rate of SMI is higher in 18-25-year-olds than in any other age group. Everyday society fails them, placing health and financial burdens on their families. Young adults with SMI are far less likely to receive necessary treatment than any other age cohort, and youth with SMI encounter obstacles as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Approximately 92% of these transitioning SMI persons are not covered by Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Eighty-nine percent of people with SMI have 2 or more mental health conditions, while 56% have 4 or more mental health conditions. Although SSI is a means tested program, APA data indicates as many as 90% of persons with SMI are not working. Other data indicate that 40% to 65% of persons with SMI who do work earn sub-poverty wages. More than 60% are school dropouts. Thus, the vast majority of person with SMI in the GAO study should be eligible for SSI.

Disability Prevention Issue

The SSI program is essential in coordinating programs of transition for youth and young adults with SMI. The SSI program is to provide health insurance through Medicaid to facilitate mental health treatments, adequate nutrition and safe and healthful housing. Failure for persons with SMI to access these vital human services can result in inhumane secondary disabling condition and diminished health.

Intervention

A letter was written to a Senate sponsor of the “Healthy Transition Act” concerning transitioning services and their relationship to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) transition programs.

Recommendation

Coordinated transition programs for persons with severe mental illness should include access to Supplemental Security Income programs and Medicaid services for needed treatment to prevent diminished health that can lead to secondary disabling conditions.