JOIN TOGETHER
A NATIONAL RESOURCE FOR COMMUNITIES FIGHTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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December 7, 1993

Mr. Jose Certa
Staff
Domestic Policy Council
Executive Office of the President
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Jose:

Substance abuse is the most important public health problem facing America's communities. That is why health reform for America's communities must include coverage for treatment of drug and alcohol problems.

There are more than 2,500 community coalitions fighting substance abuse across the country. Many are located in your state. These groups asked Join Together to convene a panel of citizens and experts to make recommendations on how substance abuse services should be financed.

The panel's report and recommendations, **Health Reform for Communities**: ***Financing Substance Abuse Services***, is enclosed. The report makes the case for including substance abuse treatment in any health plan that passes Congress.

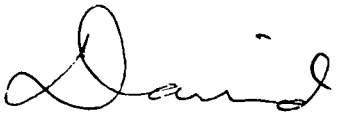
When individuals are treated for most illnesses or injuries, they are the principal beneficiaries. When individuals receive treatment for drug and alcohol problems, they and the entire community are the beneficiaries. They are more likely to keep or get jobs. They, or their children, are more likely to go to school ready and able to learn. And we are less likely to be victims of related crime and violence.

The panel, chaired by Kathryn Whitmire, the former Mayor of Houston, heard testimony that alcohol and drug abuse prevention and treatment are effective, and an essential component of any overall health care cost control strategy. Annual costs to society from untreated alcohol and drug abuse now exceed $160 billion. The panel concluded that ensuring a treatment benefit for substance abuse at less than $15 billion per year will reduce many of these costs.

JOIN TOGETHER is funded by a grant from THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION to the BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH.

Copies of this report have been distributed to thousands of community leaders throughout the nation. We have suggested that these leaders hold their own local forums, to discuss the specific substance abuse services needed in their cities and towns. We hope that you will accept invitations to attend these forums, and learn more about this important issue. Your leadership is crucial in making that appropriate coverage for alcohol and drug treatment is included in health care reform.

Sincerely,



David L. Rosenbloom, Ph.D.
Director

Enclosure: as

HEALTH REFORM FOR COMMUNITIES: Recommendations on Financing Substance Abuse Services

Join Together, a national program helping communities fight substance abuse, convened a national policy panel to explore ways communities can ensure financing for substance abuse services. The panel heard testimony from community leaders and experts in the field of substance abuse. Here are the seven recommendations that this national panel will present to Congress and bring to communities across the nation during the process of reforming our nation's health care system.

Substance abuse treatment should be financed through the same sources that fund general health care.

- New and additional sources of health care financing should include increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco.

Substance abuse prevention should be adequately financed through a combination of public and private sector funding sources.

- The existing federal block grants should be strengthened and coordinated with funds from other federal, state, and local organizations, private businesses, and religious, civic, and educational organizations.
- Proceeds from drug-related asset forfeitures and seizures should be available to enhance spending for prevention at local discretion.

The nation must make a commitment to adopt and enforce cost containment mechanisms to control the rise in health care costs throughout the health care system; substance abuse prevention and treatment in and of themselves are essential components of any overall health care cost-control strategy.

There should be universal and timely access to substance abuse diagnosis and appropriate treatment services.

- All Americans should be covered continuously for a standard set of health care benefits, including substance abuse treatment.
- Individuals involved with the criminal justice system — incarcerated, on probation, or on parole — should be guaranteed the same standard health benefits as all other Americans.
- Interim treatment must be made available to individuals who must wait for admission to more intensive programs.

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A broad continuum of substance abuse treatment services, related human services, and prevention must be available and accessible to all.

- Substance abuse treatment services must be explicitly included as part of a standard benefit package proposed for health care reform.
- Substance abuse treatment should be subject to the same coverage criteria (e.g., limits) as other health services.
- Coverage for substance abuse treatment services should include services provided by a range of trained, qualified professionals, including medical and non-medical personnel (e.g., counselors), in the most appropriate setting for the individual, including hospital and non-hospital settings.

Substance abuse treatment should be managed and coordinated to encourage the delivery of appropriate, cost effective care.

- Essential human services (e.g., outreach, transportation, child care, job training) needed by substance abusers must be available and accessible through linkages with substance abuse treatment.
- Substance abuse treatment services should be closely linked with mental health and other medical services to appropriately meet the needs of individuals with additional health problems.

Standard health care benefits should cover the cost of clinical preventive education, case finding, brief intervention counseling, and/or referral for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems.

To obtain a copy of the panel's full report, *Health Reform for Communities: Financing Substance Abuse Services, Recommendations from a Join Together Policy Panel*, or if you would like to sponsor a community meeting to educate people and groups about funding for substance abuse services in national health care reform, please call Join Together at (617) 437-1500, or send a message via HandsNet: HN1267@handsnet.org

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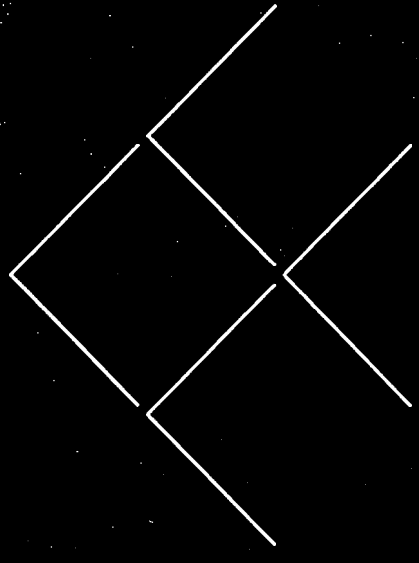
Health Reform for Communities:

Financing Substance Abuse Services

Recommendations
from a
Join Together Policy Panel



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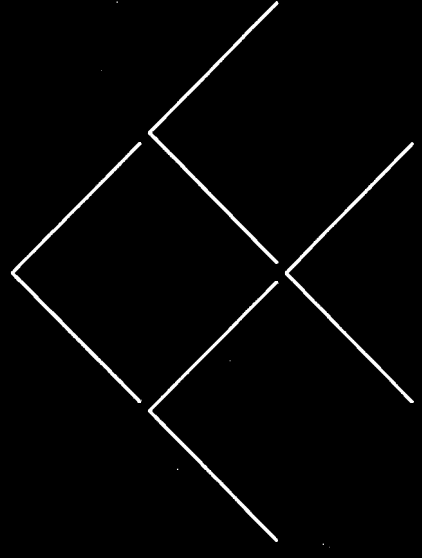

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