



## NEWS RELEASE

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# County, congressional leaders highlight importance of local behavioral health systems

## *Counties invest \$70 billion annually in community health*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – The National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD) today joined a bipartisan group of congressional leaders at a briefing on Capitol Hill to highlight the importance of county behavioral health systems and the need to reform the current system. Nearly one in five adults in the U.S. has a diagnosable mental illness, and one in 10 experiences a substance abuse disorder. Counties are at the forefront of helping these individuals.

“These are not just statistics for us; there are people behind these numbers — we know them. We are in a unique position to impact people’s lives through behavioral health services,” said NACo Pres. Sallie Clark. “Counties are on the front lines of treatment for mental illness, providing the safety net and systems of care for residents. We provide critical services for individuals with mental illnesses and substance abuse issues.”

The nation's 3,069 counties invest \$70 billion annually in community health, and as comprehensive behavioral health reform gains momentum in Congress, counties are underscoring the essential role they play in delivering services at the local level.

Clark joined Cherryl Ramirez, NACBHDD president and executive director of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs, at Wednesday’s briefing.

“County behavioral health systems exist in 23 states that serve 75 percent of America’s population,” explained Ramirez. “It is imperative that Congress sustain funding for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) block grants, which help support county-based prevention and treatment services.”

Through 750 behavioral health authorities and community providers, county governments across the country operate community-based services for persons with mental illness and substance use conditions. Of the 43 million American adults with a mental illness, fewer than half receive treatment, and of the 21 million adults with a substance abuse disorder, only 10 percent receive treatment. Counties provide essential services to these adults and are at the nexus of health care, human services, justice and public safety systems.

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Counties invest more than \$70 billion annually in justice and public safety. There are an estimated 2 million people with serious mental illnesses admitted to jails, many of whom also have co-occurring substance use disorders.

Earlier this year, NACo, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation launched *Stepping Up: A National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails*. More than 130 counties have passed resolutions or proclamations supporting the effort and pledging to take action. For more information on *Stepping Up*, visit <http://www.naco.org/resources/programs-and-initiatives/stepping-initiative>.

Clark and Ramirez were joined on the Hill by Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.); Rep. Tim Murphy (R-Pa.); Rep. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.); Harvey Rosenthal, executive director of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation; Robert Sheehan, past chief executive officer of the Community Mental Health Authority for Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties, Mich. and incoming chief executive officer of the Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards; Matthew Chase, NACo executive director; and Dr. Ron Manderscheid, NACBHDD executive director.

For more information about counties' role in behavioral health, visit <http://www.naco.org/resources/behavioral-health-matters-counties>.

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*The [National Association of Counties](http://www.naco.org) (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service. More information at: [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*