Results

The 2004 South Carolina Mental Health Parity Disparities Report Card from the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation shows that 34.5 percent of South Carolinians suffer from poor mental health as compared to 33.2 percent nationally. The majority of those suffering are members of minority groups, many who also lack any form of health insurance.

According to the Mental Health Parity: State of the States report by the Center for Policy Alternatives in 2000, South Carolina's Mental Health Coverage: 1) provides comprehensive parity for mental health and substance abuse illnesses; 2) businesses with 50 employees or less are exempt; and 3) only state employee health plans are affected by the law.

Legislation Act S0049 passed in May 2005, establishing an amendment to the Laws of South Carolina by adding a section so as to require health insurance plans to provide coverage for treatment of mental illness. In addition, bill H380 proposed which will add an amendment that requires health insurance plans to provide coverage for treatment of mental illness or alcohol or substance abuse. This bill is currently under review in the legislative sessions of the state house.

Discussion

The “B”-ranking from NAMI notes the existence of an infrastructure of good mental health care. However, in the individual area of health care services, South Carolina received a “D” ranking due to the too few inpatient mental health beds that exist in the state, a result of years of budget reform.

Conclusion

South Carolina has passed mental health care parity legislation that is better than what is available in many other states. However, there are still many people in this state that have health insurance that does not cover mental health or do not have any insurance. We hope that all the citizens of South Carolina will join us in raising the awareness for the need for better mental health care and supporting more extensive and comprehensive parity legislation for all the citizens of South Carolina. We would encourage our local and state governments to use this positive momentum to further enact legislation and provide services that will offer better mental health for all the citizens of South Carolina.