



## AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR TED STRICKLAND

Dear Governor Strickland:

As a former mental health professional, you know that over the past 15 years, new medications have revolutionized the treatment of mental illnesses. These medications, especially the new atypical antipsychotics, allow people with even the most serious illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, to hold jobs, stay in school, maintain healthy relationships and otherwise pursue fulfilling and productive lives.

Your administration's decision to limit access to these medications in order to reduce Medicaid costs has pulled the rug out from underneath some of the most vulnerable of our Ohio citizens, including children. Your position in this matter is most surprising in light of your campaign and inaugural address commitments to make access to health care a major initiative of your administration. We are particularly disheartened by the fact that the policy was developed without any input from those who will be directly impacted by it, in spite of promises of "transparency" from this administration. Make no mistake, the newly announced Medicaid Managed Care policy will adversely impact the health and well being of many Ohioans with mental illness. Furthermore, this policy will not reduce Ohio's cost of caring for this needy population.

By adopting a policy allowing Medicaid Managed Care Plans to close the door on open access, you are reversing a Medicaid policy that has served Ohioans with serious mental illness well for many years. **This decision is especially disturbing because less than six months ago, the Ohio General Assembly unanimously passed a provision to ensure open access for all mental health medications – a measure which you vetoed.**

It is extremely difficult for people with serious mental illness to navigate the public mental health bureaucracy in order to get their medication. Abrupt changes to prescribed medications or administrative delays in filling the physician's prescription lead to patients not having their medications at the time they are needed. Once they are out of medication, things often go from bad to worse. They suffer serious adverse health outcomes and are less likely to seek out and remain in treatment programs for any of their health care needs. For some this results in death some 30 years sooner than the general population. All too often individuals find themselves hospitalized, incarcerated, and/or homeless. This impacts them and costs the community. It is hard to envision a more fitting example of a policy that is penny wise and pound foolish. In fact, some states have already done the math and concluded that policies restricting access are not in their best interest.

Research demonstrates that mental health medications have highly individualized outcomes. For instance, studies show that a patient's age, race or ethnicity can impact how they respond to a particular medication. Clearly, mental health professionals and their patients are in the best position to determine the most appropriate medication regimen. Placing the decision to allow access to medication into the hands of individuals who likely have never seen the patient and may well base the decision on financial concerns is not in the best interest of patients.

Governor Strickland, surely you understand that the cost of this policy, especially when human suffering is factored into the equation, is much too high. Ohioans with mental illness and those who love and care for them deserve better. We urge you to take steps to immediately reverse your Administration's Medicaid policy restricting access to these vital medications.

Sincerely,

James C. Mauro, Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio

Todd Ivan, MD, President  
Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association

### Supporting Organizations:

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Mental Health America of Ohio  
Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence  
NAMI Ohio (National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio)  
NASW-Ohio (National Association of Social Workers of Ohio)  
Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies  
Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities  
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
Ohio Coalition of Black Nurses  
Ohio Federation for Children's Mental Health  
Ohio Hispanic Coalition  
Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association  
Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation

**Please direct any questions to NAMI Ohio at (614) 224-2700 or (800) 686-2646**