



For Immediate Release

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Adults with Mental Illness Die 25 Years Earlier Than the General Population: Local Mental Health Providers Respond with Treatment

Ansonia, CT (December 2009) - CommuniCare, Inc. (CCI) a regional behavioral healthcare partnership between **Birmingham Group Health Services, Inc. (BGHS)** - *Ansonia*; **Harbor Health Services, Inc. (HHSI)** - *Branford*; and **Bridges...A Community Support System, Inc.** - *Milford*, announced today receipt of a two-year grant from the CT Department of Public Health to implement tobacco cessation services at its three partner agencies, as well as Fellowship Place, Rushford Center, Community Health Resources, and Hartford Behavioral Health.

Recent research demonstrates that **individuals with serious mental illness are dying 25 years earlier than the general population**, and many of them from smoking-related illnesses. The issue of tobacco addiction among people with serious mental illness is substantial: people with serious mental illnesses **consume 44% of all cigarettes in the United States, while comprising less than 7% of the population**. CCI believes it is necessary to engage in an organizational change process and broaden all clinical and counseling approaches to include tobacco cessation.

CCI will partner with the leading tobacco research and consultation service in the nation, the **Addressing Tobacco Through Organizational Change (ATTOC) Program** within the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, led by Dr. Douglas Ziedonis. Dr. Ziedonis remarked, "Now is the time to address tobacco and help people to quit smoking in our mental health and addiction programs. For too long, the public system has ignored this problem and as a result our clients have a 25 year shorter life span. I am very enthused to work with CommuniCare, Inc. to help train staff and to provide assistance on organization change so that we can have better clinical treatment that will help improve health and wellness."

In making the announcement of the grant award, CCI partner agency CEOs Marilyn Cormack (BGHS), Barry Kasdan (Bridges), and Roberta Cook (HHSI) said, "We are confident that this project will greatly improve the lives of people struggling with mental illness and we look forward to implementing the program statewide."

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Pat Rehmer, Commissioner of the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services remarked, ""The award to CommuniCare, Inc. from the Tobacco Health and Trust Fund, represents a major investment in tobacco cessation services for persons with serious mental illness. CommuniCare, Inc., through its network of behavioral health care providers, will now be able to integrate tobacco cessation as a core component of their service system. Congratulations on this exciting award and its potential to improve the physical health of people with serious mental illness by supporting the coordination and integration of tobacco cessation and behavioral health care".

Tobacco Cessation services are expected to begin at each CCI agency this winter. For more information about CommuniCare, Inc., the Tobacco Cessation Grant contact: Tony Corniello, Vice President of Services, Harbor Health Services, Inc. (203) 483-2630 x227, tcorniello@harborhealthservices.org.

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