



# National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery

*Formerly known as the National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations*

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For Immediate Release

## National Coalition of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions Calls for Reasonable Response to Arizona Tragedy

WASHINGTON (1/10/11) – The National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery (NCMHR), an organization of statewide networks of persons in recovery from mental health conditions as well as individual members, joins the nation in grieving the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and other Arizonans. “We especially understand the impact of violence because, contrary to popular belief, research has shown we are no more violent than the general population and in fact are 11 times more likely to be victims of violence,” said NCMHR steering committee member Daniel B. Fisher, M.D., Ph.D.

“Let’s not scapegoat and stigmatize an entire group for the actions of a single individual,” Fisher said. “A literature review has shown that the homicide of a stranger by a person with severe mental health issues occurs to 1 in 14 million persons. This is so rare that the authors concluded it was impossible to predict violence by individuals with mental health issues (Nielsen et al., Schizophrenia Bulletin, 2009).”

The NCMHR urges decision makers to focus as much on Arizona’s and the nation’s climate of violent discourse and the need for gun control as on controlling persons labeled with mental illness. “We know from our personal experience that recovery from trauma is nurtured by respectful dialogue and blocked by vitriolic diatribe such as we see today,” Fisher continued. “We have developed the values and skills to heal the anger we believe causes much of our discord. We have learned that anger and hopelessness can be transformed to a passion for life when people are listened to and understood, especially by peers,” he said.

“As usual, there are calls for forced treatment,” he continued. “Yet Arizona already has involuntary outpatient commitment (IOC)” – which allows the compulsory treatment of individuals with mental health conditions who live in the community – “and that did not prevent this violence. In fact, IOC makes people afraid to seek treatment, fearing services that are stigmatizing and coercive.”

The NCMHR supports the provision of hopeful, compassionate services and support, and research into holistic, non-pharmaceutical approaches instead of the system’s over-reliance on psychotropic treatment. “We know from experience that peer support can reach isolated, frightened persons,” Fisher said. “So we call for a national initiative to provide peer support services at colleges and high schools to help troubled students through respectful, mutual assistance. We need to infuse recovery and support into our mental health care systems, our first responders and the criminal justice system through

innovative programs such as emotional-CPR (a preventative public health program) and peer-run alternatives to hospitalization.”

NCMHR member Harvey Rosenthal, a leading spokesperson for the peer movement, was Rep. Giffords’ classmate in 2003 at Harvard’s Kennedy School for Policy Leadership. “Gabby has a long record of fighting against discrimination on behalf of Americans diagnosed with mental health issues,” said Rosenthal. “We don’t believe she’d want stigma and discrimination to be fueled by this shooting.”

In March 2008, Giffords praised passage of the parity legislation designed to end discrimination against persons seeking treatment for mental health issues. “Discrimination has no place in our society,” said the Tucson lawmaker.

NCMHR supports the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which works to promote hope and recovery for individuals with even the most severe mental health conditions. “We appreciate the groundbreaking work SAMHSA is supporting to expand innovative outreach and engagement services, to improve service responsiveness and raise standards of care,” said NCMHR director Lauren Spiro.

The National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery (NCMHR) works to ensure that consumer/survivors have a major voice in the development and implementation of health care, mental health, and social policies at the state and national levels, empowering people to recover and lead a full life in the community.

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