

## **Statement of Mental Health America on the Tragedy in Arizona**

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. (January 10, 2011)—Mental Health America joins Americans in mourning the loss of those killed in Saturday's tragic and senseless attack and expressing our wishes for the full recovery of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and fellow citizens who were injured. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives and everyone who is affected by these horrific events. And we join in applauding the brave actions of individuals who prevented greater harm.

It will likely take many days to understand the reasons and motivations behind this national tragedy. Many have pointed to mental health as an issue.

It must first be emphasized that people with mental health conditions are no more likely to be violent than the rest of the population. And we have science-based methods to successfully treat persons with even the most severe mental illnesses. A very small group of individuals with a specific type of mental health symptoms are at greater risk for violence if their symptoms are untreated.

At the same time, we must recognize that the nation's mental health system is drastically underfunded and fails to provide Americans living with mental health conditions with the effective community-based mental health services they need. Sadly, in the current environment of strained state budgets, mental health services have been cut drastically just as demand for these critical services has risen dramatically.

It is also important that, as a community, we assist persons with signs and symptoms of mental illnesses to seek treatment. Although rare, when a person becomes so ill that he/she is a danger to themselves or others state laws provide a way to get them help even if they don't believe that they need it. The best strategy, however, is to have an accessible system of care that is easy to use.

Science has not developed tools to predict reliably individuals at risk for violence. But we can reduce the small risk of violence in those with certain mental health conditions by investing in proven intensive, coordinated community-based mental health services and making certain that

they can access these services.

We do not know if the mental health system failed in this situation or if there were missed opportunities or if effective treatment might have averted this tragedy.

We do hope that we can find answers and create solutions that prevent this from ever happening again.

**Mental Health America** ([www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)) is the country's leading nonprofit dedicated to helping all people live mentally healthier lives. With our century of service to America and our more than 300 affiliates nationwide, we represent a national movement that promotes mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation— everyday and in times of crisis.

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