

# REMHDCO

## Racial & Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition

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### July 2008 Report to the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

The Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition or *REMHDCO* is a statewide stakeholder in the mental health community. Several members serve as volunteers on the OAC's Cultural and Linguistic Technical Resource Group (CLCTRG) and some of the committees (PEI and Innovations). REMHDCO is also an active member of the MHS Community Partners group. We are a statewide coalition of non-profit state wide and local organizations, consumers and family members, whose mission is *to reduce mental health disparities for racial and ethnic communities through policy and legislative advocacy.*

#### I. PEI Statewide Project: Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building (\$6 million/yr x 4 years)

At the June OAC meeting two options were presented regarding the administration of the above Statewide project.

1. **Regardless of which option is chosen, as a statewide stakeholder representing a key PEI Priority Population, REMHDCO would like to be informed and involved with all decisions regarding the administration and content of these trainings.**

As all parties agreed in 2007 that these statewide funds were to assist counties in improving their strategies to address the five Key PEI Community Needs (*including reducing disparities*), REMHDCO believes that statewide stakeholders should be continually consulted as this statewide project moves forward.

Although REMHDCO appreciates the desire to “get the money out quickly”, we believe it is equally important to ensure that adequate attention be paid to underserved racial and ethnic communities in order to ensure that transformation includes equitable access to appropriate services. The State Department of Mental Health (DMH) has shown willingness to work with REMHDCO and other representatives of underserved racial and ethnic communities and has changed practices to ensure our voices be heard; we are encouraged that this practice will permeate to other state and local agencies and initiatives.

2. **If Option A is chosen, there should not be any assumptions made regarding the identity of the “entity capable of coordinating and delivering this program on a statewide basis”. Whatever entity or**

**organization is selected to be the coordinating entity, all statewide stakeholders, including REMHDCO, should be involved in establishing the requirements, the process and guidelines for selection, and the standards and outcome measures for evaluation of the entity's work.**

REMHDCO believes that counties must be given strong direction to ensure that *reducing disparities* is given the attention that other impact areas receive. We fear the partners awarded at the local level to have their capacity improved will not be directed or trained to ensure culturally competent services, nor will those partners chosen be those who primarily serve ethnic and racial communities.

REMHDCO believes that in order to ensure that our communities' interests are addressed, it would be wrong to automatically assume that the usual channels and methods of providing training to the counties should be followed. It should not be assumed that the old way of doing business is the best or only way of doing business.

## **II. PEI Statewide Project: Ethnically and Culturally Specific Programs and Interventions**

It is our understanding that DMH intends to fund both, the planning for the stakeholder recommendations presented at the February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, and a planning process for the PEI Ethnically and Culturally Specific Programs and Interventions. While REMHDCO commends DMH for showing this commitment to serving racial and ethnic communities, *we do not support combining these two different activities into one RFP*. It is our understanding that the Department will release an issue paper to gather more stakeholder input before releasing this RFP; we commend DMH for taking this action after hearing initial concerns from community stakeholders about including both planning processes in one RFP.

REMHDCO strongly believes that, although strongly related, one (the stakeholder recommendations) involves improving the process by which opinions suggestions, and ideas are obtained from racial and ethnic communities and in the end, how the suggestions are utilized in the decisions made by the Mental Health system to result in high quality equitable services and programs; the other (the PEI Statewide Project for Ethnically and Culturally Specific Programs and Interventions) is a process to look at specific mental health program strategies and approaches to increase access to quality services and reduce the negative mental health outcomes of racial and ethnic communities. The first initiative looks at how to create systems change by creating trust, building respect, and improving avenues for dialogue and input between the public mental health system and communities of color and the latter aims to create model programs that result in positive outcomes and strategies on how to best outreach, engage, and treat individuals with mental illness from underserved ethnic and cultural communities.