Comments on Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health  
July 22, 2016

The Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging (MNLCOA) is a champion, thought leader, planner and educator that advances positive system change for older adults, their families and caregivers. MNLCOA’s organizational members represent older adults, providers, advocacy and trade associations, as well as organizations committed to improving the care of older adults.

Mental health and aging is a public health crisis. For example, approximately six million people live with late life depression, but only a fraction receive treatment. Further, comorbidity of physical and mental conditions in adults “represents a significant and costly portion of the population.” In fact, the average total monthly costs for a person with a chronic disease and depression are $560 more than for a person without depression. (RWJF Research Synthesis Report No. 21 on Mental Disorders and Medical Comorbidity, 2011).

Unfortunately, Minnesota’s mental health support system is fragmented and primarily focuses on crisis rather than prevention and early intervention. As noted in the biennial Gaps Analyses conducted by Minnesota’s counties, mental health services are consistently rated as top gaps for seniors and people with disabilities across the state.

We support efforts to ensure a network of mental health services exists across Minnesota. We support the Task Force’s identified principles, particularly:

- Cultural responsiveness. We believe seniors have the right to culturally appropriate services.
- Person-centered and family-centered. We believe in embedding a culture of person-centered care and include caregivers in decision making.
- Choice. We believe the services must be delivered in the manner and location of the person’s choice.

We believe initiatives that explore the mental health system should include:

- The right to age with dignity and autonomy, including the right to take informed risk.
- Systems, regardless of payer source, must be integrated, holistic and flexible to support the diverse, growing and changing needs of people as they age.
- Communication strategies across health care, long term care and community based care sectors.
- A notion of individual and community responsibility and capability. Each person should understand his/her role.
- Structures that can implement change within the mental health systems. This includes policy changes and reimbursement that support evidence based interventions, collaborations across providers and systems, and continuous improvement.
- Access to a full array of mental health services throughout the state so individuals can receive services they need in their home communities whenever possible.

We look forward to continued conversations about specific changes related to mental health services. Questions can be addressed to Rajean Moone, MNLCOA Executive Director, at (651) 235-0346 or rajean@mnlcoa.org.