

OPINION

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LETTERS

More investment in mental health services needed

As we watched the horrors of Sept. 11 unfold in endless video replays, we were reminded of the thousands of individuals in psychological need who do not have access to organized, reimbursable mental health services. No event in recent memory points more emphatically to our universal psychological vulnerabilities and the necessity for services to help those most in need.

While our own psychological vulnerabilities and those of our loved ones are challenged to varying degrees, we are unified by the sense of injustice inherent in these horrific acts, the random nature of who was

hurt by them, and difficulties knowing how to address resulting trauma and psychological distress.

Being caught off-guard pointed to the longstanding inequities and gaps in our mental health care delivery system.

In the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and Congress enacted legislation that called for parity of mental health with other health care services. Despite that law, mental health services remain stigmatized and undervalued.

Connecticut, too, has mental health parity legislation from the 1990s. A decade later, under vastly

changed circumstances, we need new support from state policymakers for mental health programs, especially those that are community-based.

The manpower shortage within the mental health professions is a serious problem that calls for innovative solutions. No doubt fiscal conservatives will point to the budget shortfalls that make increasing funding for mental health seemingly impractical.

However, federal and state authorities need to commit to ongoing investments in mental health. Managed care organizations too

need to loosen restraints they have placed on the financing of mental health care.

If these steps are not taken, our nation stands to risk the well being of millions of individuals who suffer, often not even knowing so, in silence.

Editor's note: This letter was signed by Yale University School of Nursing's Jeannie V. Pasacrete, associate professor in psychiatric mental health nursing; Sally S. Cohen, associate professor and director of the Center for Health Policy and Ethics; and Janine Cataldo, lecturer in psychiatric mental health nursing.