



## About the Treatment Advocacy Center

### Our mission

The Treatment Advocacy Center is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating barriers to the timely and effective treatment of severe mental illnesses. TAC promotes laws, policies, and practices for the delivery of psychiatric care and supports the development of innovative treatments for and research into the causes of severe and persistent psychiatric illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Current federal and state policies hinder treatment for psychiatrically ill individuals who are most at risk for homelessness, arrest, or suicide. As a result, 40 percent of the 4.5 million individuals with schizophrenia and manic-depressive illness (bipolar disorder), an estimated 1.8 million people, are not being treated for their illness at any given time.

The primary reasons for lack of treatment are threefold:

- Schizophrenia and manic-depressive illness can severely impair an individual's self-awareness, causing many to believe they are healthy and not in need of medical care. Their brain disease has impaired their brain function, and since they do not think they are sick, many of them do not actively seek treatment and often refuse it.
- Civil rights advocates have changed state laws and practices to such an extent that it is now virtually impossible to treat such individuals unless they first commit a violent act.
- Public psychiatric services have deteriorated significantly in recent years with the closure of state psychiatric hospitals. While these much needed hospital beds have been eliminated, there has been no increase in outpatient services. In addition, the failure of for-profit managed care companies to provide services to these individuals who need them most has only further exacerbated the situation.

### Our activities

The Treatment Advocacy Center is working on the national, state, and local levels to educate civic, legal, criminal justice, and legislative communities on the benefits of assisted treatment in an effort to decrease homelessness, jailings, suicide, violence and other devastating consequences caused by lack of treatment.

The main activities of TAC include:

- educating policymakers and judges about the true nature of severe brain disorders, advanced treatments available for those illnesses, and the necessity of community ordered treatment in some cases;
- assisting individuals in states working to promote laws that enable individuals with the most severe brain disorders to receive assisted treatment;

- promoting innovative approaches to diverting the psychiatrically ill away from the criminal justice system and into appropriate treatment; and
- ensuring that individuals receive adequate psychiatric services and maintain medication compliance upon release from hospitals.

## **Our beginnings**

For many years, Dr. E. Fuller Torrey was an advocate for people with severe mental illnesses suffering from the consequences of lack of treatment and facing a legal system that would not intervene to help them. Among his many other efforts, he worked for fifteen years at a clinic for homeless people with severe psychiatric disorders and authored *Out of the Shadows: Confronting America's Mental Illness Crisis*, in which he highlighted the plight of those who are untreated and incarcerated.

His many experiences left him profoundly impressed by the increase in episodes of violence associated with nontreatment; his consultations with other experts in the mental health and legal fields led him to the conclusion that what was needed was a concentrated effort to address state treatment laws that prevent the treatment of people with severe mental illnesses before they suffer consequences like homelessness and incarceration. Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Stanley, generous supporters of research on schizophrenia and bipolar disorder and founders of the Stanley Medical Research Institute, shared Dr. Torrey's concerns and agreed to partially support a modest effort to improve the treatment system - which emerged in 1998 as the Treatment Advocacy Center.

Now supported by a host of additional individual donors and grants, the Treatment Advocacy Center still does not accept funding from pharmaceutical companies or entities involved in the sale, marketing or distribution of such products.

The Stanley Medical Research Institute is a supporting organization to the Treatment Advocacy Center.

As Dr. Torrey says, "Until we find the causes and definitive treatments for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, we have an obligation to those who are suffering to try to improve their lives. Except for biological chance, any one of us might today be there, living on the streets or in jail. TAC is the only organization willing to take on this fight, and I am very proud to be part of it."