

POSITION ON PIERCE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM – Adopted 4/26/16

Approximately 25% of the population has some degree of mental illness, and most are able to function with it. However, approximately five percent of the population has severe and chronic mental illness and may be unable to function independently. These individuals need publicly supported assistance to avoid harm to themselves or others and to reduce the social costs of inappropriate handling – such as incarceration. Among policy makers and the public, there is a lack of understanding of serious mental illness and the magnitude of the problems.

In 2016, there is no coordinated system for delivering services to those with serious/disabling mental illness. Such a coordinated system would include:

- Needs analysis;
- A full range of coordinated, accessible treatment options;
- Outreach, case management, and support services;
- Adequate training for public servants and others who interact with the mentally ill on a daily basis; and
- Sufficient salaries and reimbursement rates to support adequate staffing for all services.

The League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County supports enhancement of the existing services for the mentally ill to create a full system of services for the severely and chronically mentally ill in Pierce County. At minimum, the League supports the following enhancements:

- Broad community input into the delivery of mental health services by Pierce County's Regional Support Network (currently OptumHealth);
- Adoption of the 0.1% local option sales tax countywide for mental health and chemical dependency in Pierce County to enhance mental health services available in the county;
- Adoption of the 0.1% local option sales tax for affordable housing with support services in Pierce County to improve housing options for the mentally ill; and
- Expanded training for all personnel who come in contact with mentally ill persons: 911 professionals, police officers, first responders, home care workers, adult family home care workers, primary care providers, home health care coordinators, community health workers, people who work at shelters, food banks and open tables, librarians, families.

The League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County encourages the League of Women Voters of Washington to conduct a statewide mental health study and advocate for:

- Necessary funding and policies to address the issues at Western State Hospital;
- Improved standards and training requirements for certification and licensing of all occupations that intervene and treat the mentally ill;
- A coordinated system of mental health care statewide that assures adequate treatment and housing in each county.

The League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County encourages the League of Women Voters of the United States to lobby nationally for adequate Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates to assure that quality providers are available.