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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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New API Advisory board will be ‘consumer-driven’

State psychiatric hospital values input from people it serves

(Anchorage, Alaska) — The Alaska Psychiatric Institute is forming a new advisory board with a unique feature: at least seven seats will be held by people who have used the state’s mental health services.

The new board will focus on patient rights and responsibilities, as well as continuing the transformation of the hospital to a recovery-based organization. “To accomplish this, we need — at the table — the very people we serve,” API Chief Executive Officer Ron Adler said.

Andrea Schmook, a consumer-seat member of the new board, is a longtime mental health advocate in Anchorage. “It’s the people who have used your service who are the best ones to tell you what works, what needs to be changed, and maybe what you need to stop doing,” Schmook said.

Governor Sarah Palin established API’s new advisory board through Administrative Order No. 241 on July 1, 2008. The board resides within the office of the commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services. The order also dissolved the facility’s former governing body, in place since 1988.

The new board is different in purpose and intent. “The recent shift in focus is intended to support the department’s Division of Behavioral Health and hospital leadership team in the continuing transformation of API to a recovery-based organization,” Adler said. “Who else could better serve as experts on recovery from mental illness than primary consumers of services?” he asked.

The board is specifically “consumer-driven,” with a number of board seats available to consumers and the local Protection & Advocacy agency. “In reality, there will be more than seven consumer seats because some of the other representatives who are consumers of mental health services wish to remain anonymous,” Adler said.

Serving on the 11-member API advisory board requires a commitment of time and energy, including attending at least four meetings a year and serving on subcommittees. Those interested in applying for a board seat may contact Ron Adler at (907) 269-7106, or by e-mail, ron.adler@alaska.gov.