



# The Cutting Edge

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN NJ

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

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## Did you know?

### Rental Assistance

**Vouchers** are "Federal or State subsidies in the form of project or tenant based vouchers for those with very low incomes, that provide up to two-thirds of a person's fair market rent."

**Rooming Houses** provide housing, and under some licenses meals and laundry services.

**Boarding Houses** provide residents with housing, meals, laundry services, and, depending on licensure, financial and personal assistance.

**Residential Health Care Facilities** provide 24-hour supervision of residents, financial assistance, medication management, health assessment, meals and community activities.

**Emergency Shelters for the Homeless** offer shelter and meals; services vary by location.



## Change is In the Works!

### Housing is an Integral Part of Wellness -- The Need is Known

In New Jersey, there are more than 250,000 people utilizing mental health services, most of whom reside in their own homes or with their families. Over 5,500 individuals with behavioral health conditions live in supportive housing, which provides permanent, safe, affordable housing and services, with the goal of building recovery, community support and inclusion. While supportive housing is the favored form of housing for persons with behavioral health issues in recovery, there are not enough capital funding or rental assistance vouchers to support the need for that type of community placement. Several thousand others live in legacy housing, which consists of group homes and supervised apartments. Approximately 18,000 New Jerseyans with behavioral health issues reside in rooming houses, boarding houses and residential health care facilities.

### Reforms to New Jersey's Rooming and Boarding Home Industry

While some of these facilities are well cared for and able to meet resident's basic needs, many are in states of disrepair and unfit to live in. For more than 25 years the mental health community has been trying to fix this problem without much success. In 2014, a bill was introduced (S18756 Codey/A3175 Riley) calling for greater transparency of serious health and safety violations.

### About the New Law

This legislation was signed into law on February 5, 2015 and stands to make public serious health and safety violations in boarding homes, rooming houses, residential health care facilities and emergency homeless shelters. To improve living conditions and ensure that licensure requirements are being met and maintained, each facility will undergo an annual health and safety inspection. If a facility is found to be in violation of serious health and safety requirements, the owners will

**MHANJ is supporting Opening 1,000 Doors**, a campaign to add 1,000 new state rental assistance vouchers to the general fund in 2016. We encourage as many providers, families and consumers to sign the electronic petition that will be sent to our state legislative leaders and Governor Christie. [Click here for more information.](#)

Would you like to help MHANJ continue its advocacy initiatives?



be notified and the inspection reports will be posted on the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) website within 72 hours. Once the owner/operator fixes these violations, the suspension can be lifted, and the on-line reports will be updated to reflect this.

In addition to these postings, the amendments will not permit new placements to occur if a facility receives a serious health or safety violation or license suspension. The DCA Commissioner will notify the Department of Human Services (DHS) of locations with violations or license suspension to ensure that DHS makes informed decisions about the placement of homeless individuals or those with mental illness. DHS will notify psychiatric facilities, hospitals with psychiatric units and state developmental centers whenever any of these facilities receives a violation or has its license suspended, to ensure that individuals in these settings are not discharged or transferred to unsafe, unhealthy facilities. [Click here to see the new legislation.](#)

#### **Advocacy Continues**

Appropriate housing is an integral part of recovery. Hard work, and advocacy efforts by dedicated supporters has played a fundamental role in creating positive change. The Mental Health Association in New Jersey, its affiliates, the Mental Health Coalition and the NJ Behavioral Health Planning Council have developed additional recommendations and are currently working with authorities to improve conditions for individuals living in boarding homes, rooming homes and residential health care facilities.



Learn more about [MHANJ's Government Affairs](#) efforts.

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