



September 21, 2011

Supervisor Peggy West, Chair Health & Human Needs Committee
Milwaukee County Courthouse
901 North 9th Street, RM 201
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Chair West:

Over the past year, the Social Development Commission (SDC) has researched the connection between alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) and poverty. This project featured random telephone surveys, door-to-door surveys, public hearings, and interviews with industry experts. Research findings demonstrate that (1) AODA creates a significant barrier to self-sufficiency and (2) lower AODA rates translate to significant cost savings for communities. More detailed results can be found in the attached report.

Based on these findings, we submit to the Committee on Health and Human Needs the following recommendations. These recommendations are specific to Milwaukee County government and complement recommendations provided to both the private and nonprofit sectors. If enacted, these recommendations would reduce barriers to self-sufficiency, increase the impact of public expenditures, and improve the overall quality of life in Milwaukee County.

Recommendations for Change

(1) AODA services are essential to the well-being of the community and should be maintained at least at current levels in future budgets. Research documents the tremendous cost savings associated with AODA services. Thus, when addressing the growing structural deficits facing Milwaukee County, it would be pragmatic to maintain funding for these services. Cuts in current AODA programming would only create new costs in other service areas. In fact, based on the documented savings, the county should consider increasing funding for AODA services in order to save money in other areas.

(2) Dedicate local funds to permanently support the Milwaukee County Drug Court: Milwaukee County has received federal pilot grants totaling \$349,995 to fund the drug treatment court from September 1, 2009 to August 30, 2012. Considering the proven benefits to the individual and the cost savings for the community that drug courts produce, the county should reallocate tax levy within its court and criminal justice budgets to permanently fund the drug court after the pilot grants expire. This reallocation would stabilize the court and efficiently use tax dollars.

(3) Shift to an epidemiological response model that approaches AODA as a disease rather than a personal failing: Milwaukee County's AODA and Behavioral Health systems face a growing structural deficit, which results from the increasing costs associated with AODA services and decreased revenue from the state and federal governments. To maintain services, the county has been compelled to use ever-increasing amounts of tax levy.

This structural deficit is not sustainable and indicates a need for fundamental change in the approach used to provide these services. Shifting to a comprehensive, epidemiological strategy will enable Milwaukee County to restructure its service delivery system and identify effective and financially efficient strategies for both internal and external implementation. Other local governments have made this shift by conducting a comprehensive analysis of their service delivery system, identifying what works, and drafting a long-term, comprehensive strategy.

(4) Craft a more coordinated campaign to emphasize prevention. The easiest way to address an issue is to avoid that issue from ever occurring. Prevention is a proven method for reducing AODA that limits many negative externalities—including lost productivity, treatment costs, and criminal enforcement. Unfortunately, traditional prevention strategies focus mainly on youth while ignoring other common risk groups: seniors, the unemployed and low-income, victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, immigrants, and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). To maximize the impact of prevention efforts, a more coordinated campaign must be crafted. The county should provide more cross-training opportunities for teachers, health care providers, and social workers as well as public education programs that help individuals identify the early warning signs of AODA in family and friends.

(5) Increase comprehensive treatment options and outpatient services. Treatment represents a cheaper and more effective method for reducing AODA rates compared to traditional criminal enforcement. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of treatment options available to low-income residents. As of 2004, the unmet capacity for AODA treatment in Milwaukee County was approximately 82,000 residents. To address this need, the current service delivery structure should be analyzed for cost savings—for example, analyze the impact of concentrating more resources in outpatient services over more costly inpatient services. But cost savings may only partially meet the demand for these services. Studies demonstrate that AODA treatment creates a return-on-investment of \$12 to every \$1 invested. By addressing the significant unmet need for AODA treatment in Milwaukee County, substantial cost savings for county residents could be realized.

Given the significant need to address both AODA and poverty in Milwaukee County, we sincerely hope that you will consider supporting the recommendations detailed above. We look forward to discussing the need for these actions with you in more detail.

Thank you for your service and commitment to improving the quality of life in Milwaukee County.

Respectfully yours,

Social Development Commission
The Bridge Health Clinics & Research Center
Community Advocates – Public Policy Institute
Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope
Meta House, Inc.
The Bread of Healing Clinic
Sojourner Family Peace Center
Milwaukee Continuum of Care

Center for Veteran's Issues
Wisconsin Community Action Partnership
Wisconsin Community Services
NAACP – Milwaukee Branch
AJA Counseling Center
The New Horizon Center, Inc.
Health Care for the Homeless

Cc: Vice Chair Eyon Biddle Sr., Supervisor Michael Mayo Sr., Supervisor Joseph Rice, Supervisor Patricia Jursik, Supervisor Theodore Lipscomb Sr., Supervisor Nikiya Harris

