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New Report Highlights Needed Improvements in Ohio's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for Children and Families

Columbus, OH- A new report released today urges sweeping reforms to Ohio's mental health and substance abuse services. Co-facilitator of the Access to Better Care Initiative Gayle Channing Tenenbaum says it is essential that the group's recommendations be implemented in the Governor's next budget, in spite of a predicted \$5 billion deficit.

"Even in a time of limited resources we cannot wait to provide needed treatment for children who are addicted or mentally ill," Says Tenenbaum. "We must realign our existing resources as well as find new ones to serve children in early care, school and family settings."

Tenenbaum says the recommendations were developed during the past year by agency heads and advocates and over 120 state and county level agencies in consultation with cabinet directors who wanted to create a continuum of care for all Ohio children and families. The Workgroup began their work after a survey of child serving agencies found that untreated behavioral health care problems are the leading cause of suicide among teenagers; contribute to school failure, and are a major factor in custody relinquishment. The recommendations address prevention, early identification and treatment for mental health and substance abuse problems equally. Cheri L. Walter, CEO of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities says that investing in prevention and early identification is key.

"It is no coincidence that leaders across the human services spectrum have come together to develop a plan to address the behavioral health needs of children," says Walter. "We have finally come to the realization that shortchanging kids in these areas only results in increased costs in other parts of the system."

Tenenbaum and Walter released the report Wednesday morning at the office of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities with other Workgroup members, including Crystal Ward Allen, Executive Director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio; Terre Garner, Executive Director, Ohio Federation for Children's Mental Health and parent advocate; and Donna Conley, Executive Director, Ohio Citizen Advocates. Copies of the report are available from PCSAO by request. Contact Jessica Schneider at 614-224-5802 for a copy of the report. **Contact Gayle Channing Tenenbaum at 614-226-3116 to request an interview.**

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