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**ADMH Joins Groups Nationwide to Change Attitudes and Lives During
Mental Illness Awareness Week**

MONTGOMERY – One in four adults will experience a mental health problem in any given year, and more than one in 17 live with a serious, chronic mental illness. The Alabama Department of Mental Health is joining efforts nationwide to celebrate Mental Illness Awareness Week, sponsored annually by The National Alliance on Mental Illness. The observance, which has been in existence for more than 20 years, seeks to increase awareness about mental illnesses and reduce stigma. This year's MIAW is being observed nationwide October 7-13.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health serves more than 100,000 Alabamians with mental illnesses each year. More than 97 percent of those individuals are experiencing recovery and living in the community. ADMH and other groups also work to decrease stigma surrounding mental illnesses through various public education efforts. This year, several NAMI Alabama affiliates are hosting a variety of events during MIAW. NAMI Mobile is hosting both an "Unmasking Mental Illness" Kick-Off Gala on Friday, October 12, and the 3rd annual Friends and Family Walk for Mental Illness the next day on Saturday, October 13. More information about events surrounding MIAW can be found at www.namialabama.org.

In this election year, it's worth remembering that mental illnesses are medical illnesses that do not discriminate, affecting Republicans, Democrats and independent voters alike. It's not a partisan issue, but it does involve and affect economic and budget issues. Since 2012, states have cut mental health services by \$1.6 billion at the same time the need has increased. Unemployed people have been four times more likely to report symptoms of severe mental illnesses than others. Americans who experienced involuntary changes in employment status, such as pay cuts or reduced hours, were twice as likely. The need also is increasing as troops return home from Iraq and Afghanistan, some with "hidden wounds." When mental health care isn't available in a community, the results often are lost jobs and careers, broken families, more homelessness, more welfare and much more expensive costs for hospital emergency rooms, nursing homes, schools, police and even courts, jails and prisons.

"Many people in our communities are directly affected by mental illnesses," said Dr. Beverly Bell-Shambley, associate commissioner of ADMH's Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. "The good news is treatment works and recovery is possible, but only if people can get access to that treatment." Less than one-third of adults and less than one-half of children with a diagnosed illness receive treatment. "The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that stigma is a major barrier to people seeking help when they need it," Bell-Shambley said. "That's why MIAW is so important. We want people to learn the facts and end myths to help break the stigma, and silence, that too often surround the

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topic. The more people know, the better they can help themselves or help their loved ones get the help and support they need. By changing attitudes about mental illness, we can change lives.”

Mental illnesses can profoundly disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood and ability to relate to others. The most common forms of mental illness are major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and a range of anxiety disorders. Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion or socioeconomic status, but on average, have very high treatment success rates. Early identification of symptoms and treatment results in better outcomes and leads to more productive, fulfilling lives.

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RESOURCES

More information on Mental Illness Awareness Week can be found by visiting www.nami.org.

Information on mental illness services in the state of Alabama can be obtained by contacting the ADMH Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services at (334)242-3200 or by visiting www.mh.alabama.gov.