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NCDVTMH is Committed to Survivor-Led, Evidence-Based Solutions to Houselessness and Mental Health

CHICAGO, IL - As a national resource center focused on survivor-defined safety and healing, the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (NCDVTMH) is deeply concerned about approaches that promote involuntary civil commitment and institutionalization of unhoused individuals struggling with mental health challenges – approaches that run counter to what people need to recover and heal and what the evidence clearly supports. For survivors of domestic violence, who make up the majority of unhoused women, this type of approach replicates the coercive control they are trying to escape.

Research has consistently documented that:

- The majority of unhoused women report domestic violence as the immediate cause of their houselessness.[1]
- The majority of women served in acute mental health settings have experienced domestic violence.[2]
- The majority of women being abused by an intimate partner experience abuse targeted towards their mental health, a pattern of abuse known as mental health coercion.[3]
- Involuntary commitment through the manipulation of civil commitment procedures is an all too common form of mental health coercion.

Forcing survivors who have experienced domestic violence into institutions is not a solution. Not only is it harmful and retraumatizing, but it also violates their autonomy and safety and replicates the dynamics of abuse. Coercion is antithetical to healing.

Mental health support must be accessible, comprehensive, person-centered, survivor-led, and community-based. Involuntary treatment and institutionalization undermine what survivors need to heal from experiences of abuse and control. Effective support honors survivors' lived experiences and recognizes that they are the experts of their own lives. It is essential to create environments that empower survivors, provide access, and offer choice, rather than stripping away their dignity and agency.

Housing is the foundation for safety, healing, and well-being. Rather than criminalizing houselessness and mental illness, there needs to be genuine investment in proven solutions: comprehensive wraparound services, trauma-informed care, peer support networks, evidence-based approaches, and the resources to ensure access to housing. Forced treatment only inflicts additional harm and undermines the safety and healing that survivors and their families seek.

NCDVTMH is committed to addressing the root causes of houselessness and mental health challenges, including stigma and domestic violence, and to creating healing and empowering environments for survivors. All people deserve dignity, respect, and compassionate services that meet them where they are, along with evidence-based approaches that truly foster healing, empowerment, and safety for all.

Footnotes:

[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. "Domestic Violence and Homelessness: Statistics (2016)." https://acf.gov/ofvps/fact-sheet/domestic-violence-and-homelessness-statistics-2016

[2] National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health. "Information Memorandum on the Intersection of Domestic Violence, Mental Health, and Substance Use." https://ncdvtmh.org/resource/information-memorandum-on-the-intersection-of-domestic-violence-mental-health-and-substance-use/

[3] National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health. "Mental Health and Substance Use Coercion Surveys Report." https://ncdvtmh.org/resource/mental-health-and-substance-use-coercion-surveys-report/

About NCDVTMH: The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (NCDVTMH) is a leading organization dedicated to addressing the complex intersections of gender-based violence, trauma, mental health, and substance use. NCDVTMH promotes survivor-defined healing, liberation, and equity by transforming the systems that impact survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families.

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