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CONTACT:
Aaron Cohen
301-633-6773
aaroncohenpr@gmail.com

National Council for Behavioral Health Honors Excellence in Behavioral Health Advocacy, Innovation, Leadership

*Awards of Excellence winners honored at NatCon17 gala include the First Lady of New York City*

April 5, 2017, SEATTLE, WA – How mental health counselors and local police work together using technology to help people in crisis is a theme running through this year’s winners of the National Council for Behavioral Health’s Awards of Excellence.

The honorees on the red carpet in Seattle last night received the coveted National Council Awards of Excellence for improving the lives of Americans living with mental illnesses and addictions.

This year’s honorees are finding innovative ways to help underserved populations. About one-third are being heralded for working to reduce the high prevalence of mental illness in the criminal justice system.

Twenty-two awards were handed out during the event at the NatCon17 conference in Seattle, Wash., fondly dubbed “The Oscars of Behavioral Health.”

“These honorees show us what excellence in behavioral health looks like,” said Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health. “They are finding ways to make a real difference in their communities.”

Award categories ranged from Doc of the Year and Excellence in Addictions Treatment to Peer Specialist of the Year and Rising Star. Four national leaders received Visionary Leader Awards and First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray, received a Change Champion award for ThriveNYC, her initiative to boost mental health service access and awareness in NYC, including planning to train 250,000 Mental Health First Aiders citywide.

Upon acceptance of the award, McCray said, “the more we collaborate, the more good we can do. And the more lives we can save. Thanks to you, we are starting to bring resources into the same places where people live, work, worship and learn. Thanks to you, our nation is finally beginning to change its mindset around the mind.”

The Scattergood Foundation and the National Council teamed to bestow an Innovation Award on Hopeworks ‘n Camden, selected from five finalists via online public voting and announced at the dinner last night. The award is given to honor organizations and individuals who challenge how behavioral health care is currently viewed, organized and practiced through the creation of catalytic concepts, products, processes, services and/or technologies.
NOTE TO PHOTO EDITORS: Photos of specific winners are available on request. Please contact aaroncohenpr@gmail.com.

About the National Council for Behavioral Health

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America’s mental health and addictions treatment organizations. Together with more than 2,800 member organizations, serving 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery. The National Council was instrumental in bringing Mental Health First Aid to the USA and more than 1 million individuals have been trained. In 2014, the National Council merged with the State Associations of Addiction Services (SAAS). To learn more about the National Council, visit www.TheNationalCouncil.org.

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THE HONOREES

Champion of Excellence
Sponsored by Relias Learning
Harriet Hall, Jefferson Center for Mental Health, Wheat Ridge, Colo.

Harriet Hall noted when accepting the award: “…one of my most important leadership lessons came in the aftermath of Columbine. We quickly learned that we couldn’t adequately care for the community if we didn’t care for ourselves. I had to learn to take care of staff and we had to learn to take care of ourselves. I also had to remember that I’m not essential to everything, that I can trust in my team. Because I haven’t done my job well if others can’t carry on effectively without my constant guidance. I really want to share this award with the entire leadership team and all the staff at Jefferson Center who dedicate themselves to care for the community we serve.”

Change Champion Award
Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City

The First Lady noted in her remarks: “Through ThriveNYC, we have made a commitment to train 250,000 New Yorkers in Mental Health First Aid within five years. Now, a quarter-million is a big number. But I’m pleased to report that we are already ahead of schedule, and that has so much to do with the support we’ve received from the National Council for Behavioral Health.”

Doc of the Year
Sponsored by Envolve

As Don Miskowiec, President and Chief Executive Officer of North Central Behavioral Health Systems, noted when presenting the award: “How do we get quality care to the people who actually need it? That’s the challenge. Using an approach that is at once data driven and laser
focused on client needs to overhaul the clinical practice at the Tucson, Arizona Crisis Response Center, [Margie Balfour] has dramatically improved outcomes. She even developed and published her own outcome measure set for facility-based crisis services, expanding the impact of her innovations around the country.”

**Excellence in Addictions Treatment**  
*Sponsored by myStrength*  
Keith Walker, Walker Funeral Homes, Toledo, Ohio

Jennifer Moses, CEO of the Zepf Center, said this about Keith Walker: “I first met Keith Walker about two years ago, when he came to the Zepf Center, looking to partner on the Help with Heroin campaign. I'll never forget what he said to me about why he started the campaign, ‘the people who are dying are our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends. Our funeral homes have a responsibility to do what we can about these deaths and to get the word out that help is only a call away.’”

**Excellence in Addictions Treatment**  
*Sponsored by myStrength*  
Rosecrance, Rockford, Ill.

Philip W. Eaton, President/CEO: “The Rosecrance Florian program serves a unique population, meeting the needs and challenges of first responders who need substance abuse treatment. These are men and women who never considered or imagined the benefits of group therapy. Now, they are finding peace, guidance, faith and solace knowing that they are not alone.”

**Excellence in Advocacy – Individual Achievement**  
*Sponsored by Sunovion*  
Molly Carney, Evergreen Treatment Services, Seattle, Wash.

Molly Carney noted in her acceptance speech: “Even with growing recognition of the opioid crisis, there are still many pockets of the country where medication-assisted treatment programs are stigmatized and rejected by policymakers. We must continue to change this. With persistence and by truly listening and responding to stakeholders’ concerns, I have found it is possible to change the minds of even the most staunchly opposed officials.”

**Excellence in Advocacy by an Elected Official**  
*Sponsored by Sunovion*  

Rich LeClerc noted when introducing the winners: “Senator Archambault and Representative Shekarchi worked together on this legislation, which protects the health and welfare of people with mental illnesses and addictions and the safety of Rhode Island’s police officers.” Senator Archambault said in his acceptance speech: “My heart swells with the knowledge that this training will help countless people with serious mental illnesses without criminalizing them. We
have a responsibility in society to make sure we address these needs, and Rhode Island deserves a pat on the back for this great work.”

**Excellence in Artistic Expression**
Logan Lynn, Keep Oregon Well, Portland, Ore.

Logan Lynn performed an original song on stage. When accepting the award, he said: “It wasn’t until a trauma-informed behavioral health specialist asked me, ‘What has happened to you?’ in my final stint in rehab that I was able to finally connect to the origins of my suffering and begin to heal. I just celebrated 9 years in long-term recovery from addiction, thanks to the work of people like you and a small army of people who always believed in my inherent dignity and worth, even when I was too sick to believe it myself.”

**Excellence in Behavioral Healthcare Management**
*Sponsored by MHHRG Negley*
Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Gainesville, Fla.

Meridian Behavioral Health CEO Maggie Labarta said when accepting the award: “This program is especially meaningful to us because it brings Meridian’s vision of hope, recovery and wellness to some of the most disenfranchised members of our community. For example, when one participant enrolled, he had been out of prison for only 6 months of his 36-year adult life due to numerous violent infractions. Although there were challenges along the way, including a return trip to jail, he has now been in treatment and out of jail for multiple years, and has not committed any violent offenses. His success story is just one among the hundreds of people the Forensic program has touched.”

**Excellence in Mental Health First Aid Community Impact**
*Sponsored by the Missouri Department of Mental Health and Mental Health First Aid USA*
Mental Health First Aid for New Jersey, Springfield, N.J.

Bob Kley, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Mental Health Association in New Jersey, said: “Mental Health First Aid has great benefits for instructors, trainees and the communities they serve, but it goes even further. The program is a key catalyst for stigma-reduction efforts and, over time, will help us move toward deeper integration of physical and mental health care. It is our hope the model we’ve pioneered in New Jersey will be adopted by other states around the country, further extending its impact.”

**Excellence in Technology**
*Sponsored by Qualifacts*
Burrell Behavioral Health, Springfield, Mo.

Paul Thomlinson, Vice President of Research and Quality Assurance, said: “This program is making a real difference. Let me tell you a quick story. An officer repeatedly encountered a citizen so agitated he could be subdued only with a Taser. In their fifth encounter, the officer had a VMCI iPad. The officer was able to connect the person in crisis to a trained crisis counselor,
and then to community based care. So, we have a new t-shirt tagline: Using Tablets Instead of Tasers!”

**Excellence in Technology**
*Sponsored by Qualifacts*
Grand Lake Mental Health Center (GLMHC), Inc., Nowata, Okla.

Larry Smith, Chief Operating Officer: “Thanks to the efforts of the Grand Lake Mental Health Center team and other organizations, iPad technology and HIPAA-compliant FaceTime communication is being used by medical personnel, law enforcement officers, GLMHC staff and consumers in seven rural Oklahoma counties. It enables us to provide service when and where the consumer needs it. In the first five months of the program alone, 62 percent of potential inpatient psychiatric admissions were diverted to outpatient or virtual care instead.”

**Excellence in Whole Person Care**
*Sponsored by Envolve*
Carolinas HealthCare System, Charlotte, N.C.

Dr. Manuel Castro, Chief Clinical Officer of Behavioral Health at the Carolinas Healthcare System, noted when accepting the award: “…the ultimate reward is saving lives. Of clients who came to the BHI program reporting suicidal ideation, 83 percent no longer had these thoughts on graduation. For me this is worth everything.”

**Peer Specialist of the Year**
*Sponsored by Envolve*

Robert Ortiz said when accepting the award: “To my fellow Peer Workers and Specialists, I say never give up hope—on yourself, or others—and always be vigilant in supporting anyone and everyone we can.”

**Rising Star**
*Sponsored by Relias Learning*
Paul Rada, Truman Medical Center, Lees Summit, Mo.

Paul Rada said when accepting the award: “During school, I had a patient in hospice, with family rushing across country to be by her side. She could communicate only in writing. At the end of my clinical day, she handed me a note, ‘Will you please hold my hand for a little while?’ I nodded yes. One hour turned into five, and staff urged me to leave, promising I’d return the next day. Another note, ‘Just 15 more minutes please?’ Staff insisted I leave, so I apologized, and said, ‘Goodnight.’ The next morning, her room was empty; she passed away an hour after I left. Since then, I’ve been trying to get back those 15 minutes by giving them to someone else.”

**Visionary Leadership**
Don Miskowiec, President and Chief Executive Officer of North Central Behavioral Health Systems, noted when presenting the award: “When a public health crisis strikes a community, caring for residents’ behavioral health is just as critical as their physical well-being. And nowhere have we seen this more vividly than in Flint, Mich. [Danis Russell] has worked tirelessly with his team at Genesee Health System to address needs specifically related to the crisis. You can imagine the anxiety, the fear, the distrust that has pervaded the people of Flint. Children were poisoned, and we do not know how bad it will get. This honoree is in the trenches with these families, keeping an eye on the long-term, but helping them get through the day to day.”

**Visionary Leader**
Steve Lipinski, Executive Director, Washburn Center for Children, Minneapolis, Minn.
Steve Lipinski said when accepting his award, “Through awareness programs like Washburn’s Break the Silence campaign, we’ve made progress in using evidence to treat children and have reduced stigma. Parents are more willing to address anxiety, ADHD and other behavioral health issues and to get support earlier.”

**Visionary Leader**
Phillip (Randy) Tate, Chief Executive Officer, NorthCare, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Randy Tate said in his acceptance speech: “Vision starts with a determination to never give up; never let elected officials off the hook. But recognize that you can never rely on government for all you need. That reality has fueled many of our innovative initiatives, like bringing a pharmacy into NorthCare and many other community mental health centers, as both a convenience to clients and an essential revenue stream.”

**Visionary Leader**
Dr. Arthur Evans, Chief Executive Officer, American Psychological Association (formerly Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services), Philadelphia, Penn.
Dr. Evans said in his acceptance speech: “As a field, we’ve made strides in helping society recognize how behavioral health issues affect every aspect of our lives. But we must keep pushing the envelope, drawing outside the lines to reach more people and improve our effectiveness. As I assume my new role as CEO for the American Psychological Association, I am excited to have an opportunity to draw on our collective experiences to shape the national policy discussion to more effectively address the behavioral health needs of our society.”

**Innovation Award**
*Sponsored by Scattergood Foundation*
Hopeworks ‘n Camden, Camden, N.J.
Dan Rhoton and Gemyra Wynn

By presenting information about adverse childhood experiences in an engaging and non-traditional way, the young people of the Youth Healing Team are working to spread the information about the effects of trauma to audiences who would not normally hear about it.
President’s Award for Innovative Advocacy
Road Recovery
Jack Bookbinder and Gene Bowen
New York, N.Y.

Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National Council said: “Behavioral health treatment is never one-size fits all. The more treatment can be tailored to the unique circumstances, needs and interests of a person, the more successful it will be in their recovery. The founders of Road Recovery have used their love of music and experience in the music industry to both reach individual young people who thrive in this supportive environment and showcase the music they create to spread the word that treatment works.”