



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES

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Broadcast MSG BHP#024

August 1, 2011

ACD

To: Executive Director, Texas Council of Community MHMR Centers
Superintendents, State Mental Health Facilities
Executive Directors, Local Mental Health Authorities
Executive Director, Disability Rights Texas
Members of the Local Area Network Advisory Committee (LANAC)
Members of the Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council (MHPAC)
DSHS Mental Health Services, Executive and Program Staff

From: Ross C. Robinson, Director
Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Program Services

Re: Implementation of House Bill 1481 Concerning the Use of Person First Language

Introduction

During the 82nd legislative session, House Bill 1481 passed. This bill establishes preferred terms and phrases for use in new and revised legislation; department rules, policies and procedures; reference materials; publications; and electronic media that places the person before the disability. The legislature's preference for use of person first language applies not only to the department and its facilities but to its contractors as well. The following chart provides examples of the appropriate use of person first language.

Preferred Terminology

- persons with disabilities
- persons with developmental disabilities
- persons with mental illness
- persons with intellectual disabilities

Terminology to Avoid

- disabled
- developmentally disabled
- mentally disabled
- mentally ill
- mentally retarded
- handicapped
- cripple
- crippled

Required Action

The Department believes that most State Mental Health Facilities, Local Mental Health Authorities and their contractors are already using person first language in the majority of their current policies, publications and media. However, please review all of the documents outlined in this bill. In the event that you identify any documents that are out of compliance, please take the steps necessary to implement the new statutory requirements.

Conclusion

The legislature determined that language used in reference to persons with disabilities shapes and reflects society's attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Furthermore, this bill acknowledges that certain terms and phrases create an invisible barrier to inclusion as equal members of the community. Thank you for your continued efforts to address this important issue.

Please contact Janet Fletcher with any questions or concerns at 512/467-5425.