

## 2011 Legislative Session – Why This Year is Different

The 2011 Legislative session promises to be one of the toughest in a very long time. Funding for essential mental health services will be at risk if we don't take action now and throughout the session. There are number of factors that will make this session especially difficult.

### **The Budget**

Minnesota is currently facing a \$5.08 billion deficit for the next two years. For perspective, this represents about 19 percent of the state's total budget. As the chart below shows, Health and Human Services and K-12 education funding represent about two-thirds of the overall budget. Both legislative leaders and the Governor have vowed not to cut funding for K-12 education as part of any budget solution. What's more, leaders in the House and Senate have pledged not to raise any new revenue to solve the state's budget crisis and instead plan to close the budget gap with spending cuts alone. With Health and Human Services funding representing nearly one-third of the state's budget, there would need to be massive cuts to programs and services (including mental health) in order to fix the deficit without any new revenue. Rep. Jim Ablar, Chair of the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee, estimates that about \$1.6 billion will need to be cut from the Health and Human Services budget.

### **MN State Budget**



### **New Leadership & New Members**

We now have a DFL Governor while both branches of the Legislature are controlled by newly-elected Republican majorities. There are an unprecedented number of brand new representatives and senators. Of the 134 members of the Minnesota House of Representatives, 39 have never held office before and 25 of Minnesota's 67 senators are new as well. This means about 1 in 3 legislators have little or no experience in state policy making. Nearly 1/3 of the House Health and Human Services Committee members and about 1/3 of Senate Health and Human Services Committee members are new as well. Many of these new legislators know very little about mental health issues and even less about the programs and services children and adults living with mental illnesses rely on. If legislators do not understand why programs and services for people with mental illnesses are essential, those programs could be in danger of significant funding cuts.

### **What You Can Do**

It is up to everyone to educate their legislators about mental illnesses and why mental health treatment and services are so vitally important. We need you to write and call your legislators now and throughout the session. We also need you to reach out to your friends, family, co-workers, neighbors and others and urge them to call and write their legislators as well. We also need people to write letters to the editor for your local paper. We need to act as a movement, fighting for mental health treatment and services.

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Sign-up for NAMI's Legislative Updates at [www.namihelps.org](http://www.namihelps.org) to find out what's happening at the Capitol and how you can get involved.