

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2014

New Challenges in the Americas

ADVOCACY & POLICY

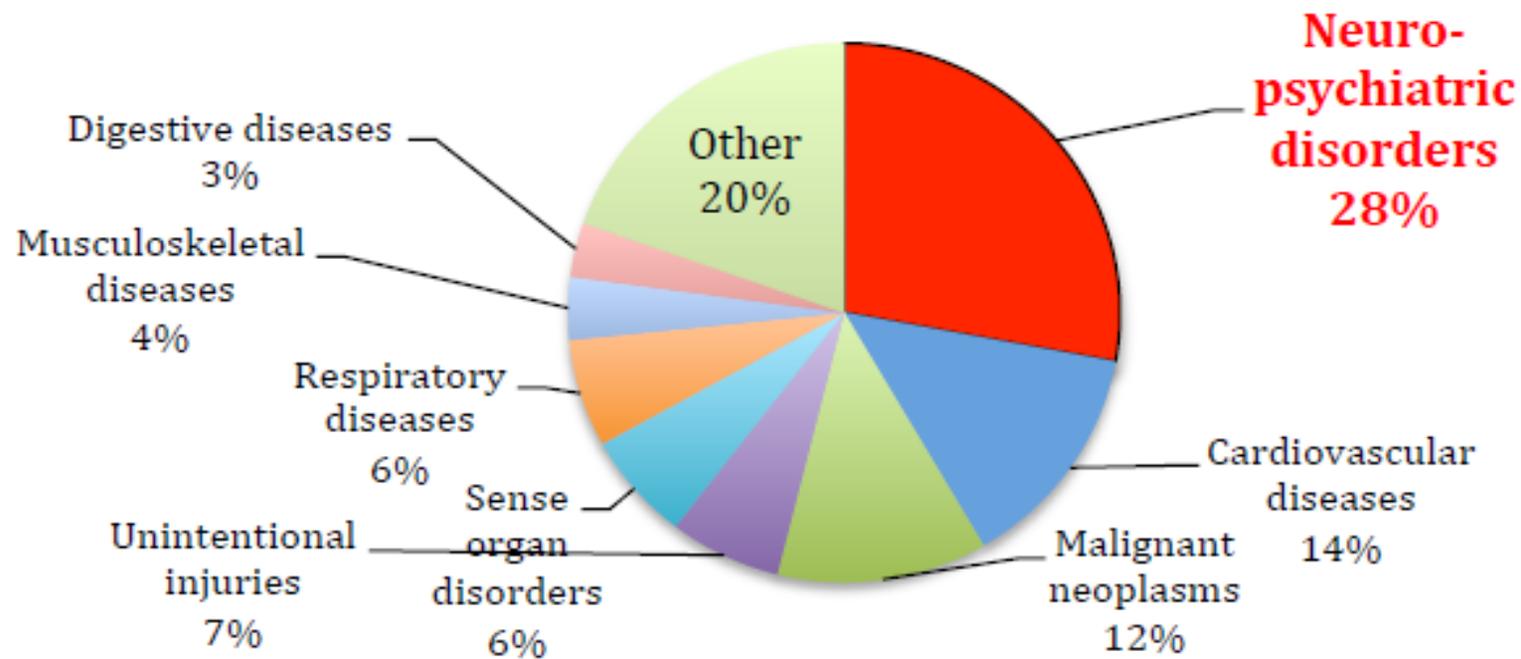
Laurie Flynn

**Pan American Health Organization
Oct.10, 2014**

WHO Report 2003

"Advocacy is an important means of raising awareness on mental health issues and ensuring that mental health is on the national agenda of governments. Advocacy can lead to improvements in policy, legislation and service development."

Burden of Disease (Percent of total DALYs, US and Canada)



¹ Source: National Institute of Mental Health; World Health Organization

Where We Are Now

- ❑ a time of renewed energy, hope and optimism about mental illness
- ❑ major advances in neuroscience research and thru new technology
- ❑ global communication thru internet brings worldwide audience
- ❑ mental disorders moving from stigmatized and misunderstood as personal weaknesses to being viewed as complex brain disorders

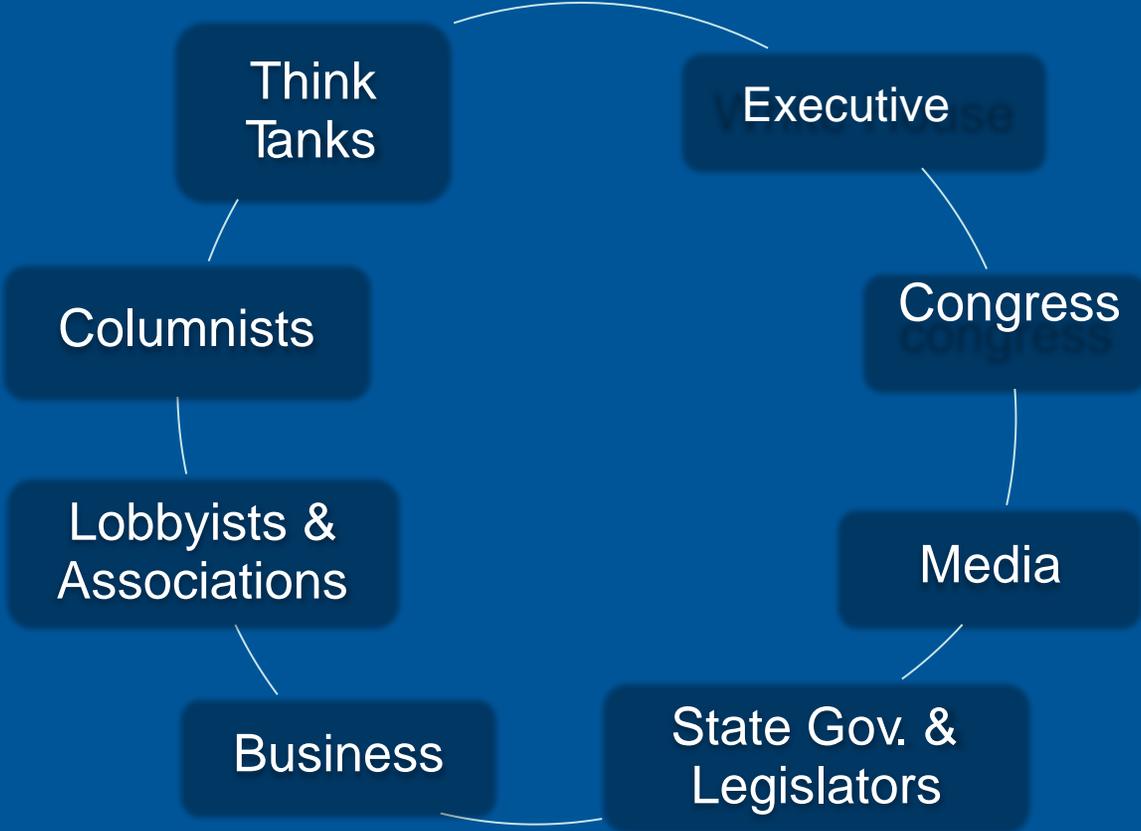
Healthcare: The Perennial Issue

- Personal
- Complicated
- Costly
- Political
- Dynamic

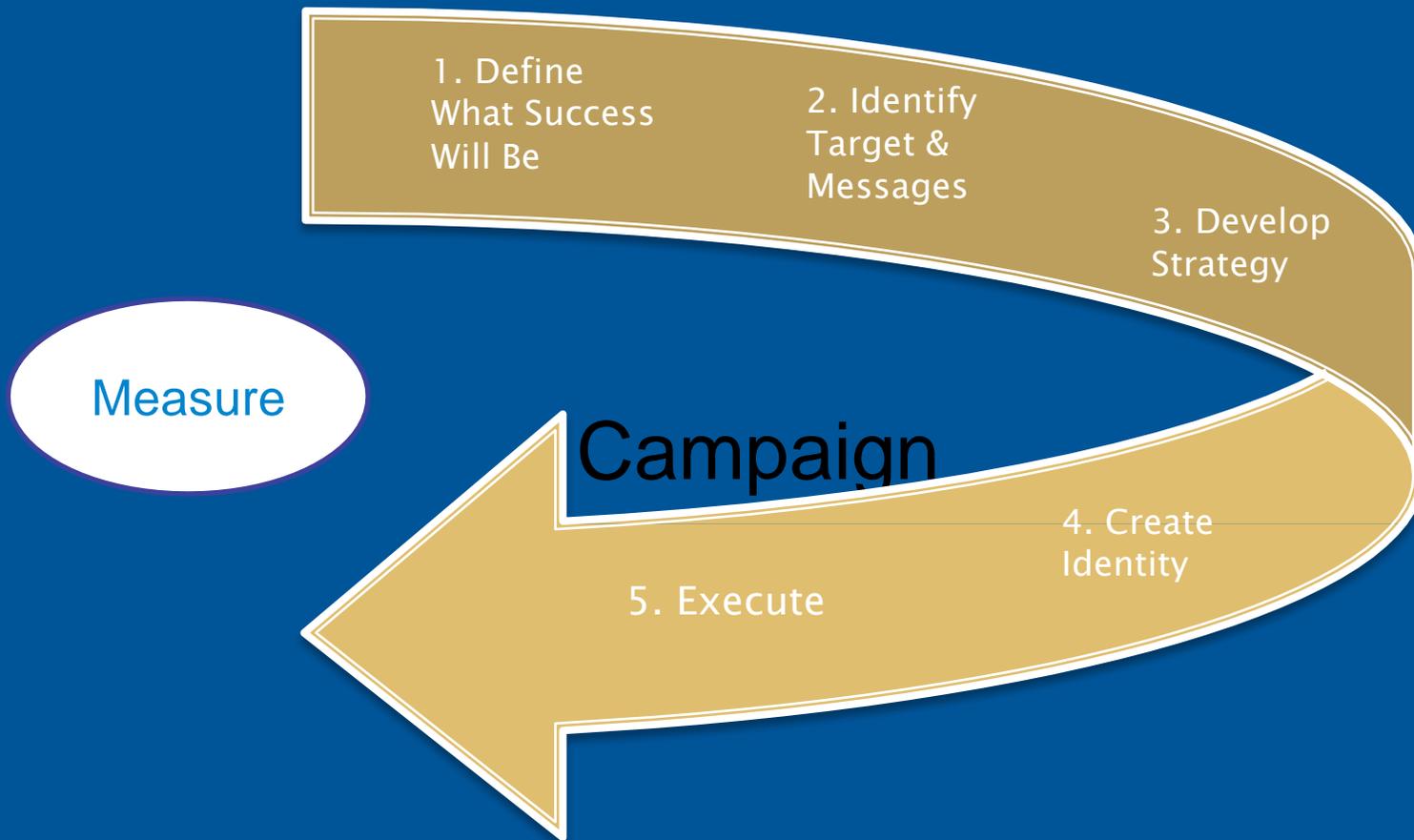
What Works

- ❑ Passion--Persuasion--Persistence
- ❑ Best US example is Parity
- ❑ Patients & families speaking out to challenge stereotypes & stigma
- ❑ Reframed insurance coverage gap as discrimination by diagnosis
- ❑ Bipartisan policy support grew
- ❑ "Mental illnesses are brain disorders. Treatment works"
- ❑ Perhaps we blame stigma too much. If we were more visible and vocal, we'd have more victories.

Policy Drivers



The Process



Policy Change: What works?

- ❑ Start where evidence is strongest
- ❑ Offer specific solutions, not general ideas
- ❑ Know the numbers and dollars involved
- ❑ Clear, consistent voice and message
- ❑ Data is good; case examples are better
- ❑ Find strong champion and use media

Remember, elected officials work for YOU!

Building Relationships

- ❑ It's not what you know, it's who you know!!
- ❑ Advocates must connect with elected officials
- ❑ Meet your representatives 3-4 times annually
- ❑ Visit and meet office staff
- ❑ Speak up at public hearings, town halls

Building Relationships

- Invite officials to visit your program
- Invite him/her to speak
- Interview for your publication
- Create an email or web forum
- Cultivate key aides and friends

Remember politicians are "people oriented"!

Digital Advocacy is Growing

- ❑ Google, WebMD, health apps
- ❑ Information sharing ---> Activism
- ❑ Internet communities, support groups, calls to action "go viral"
- ❑ A rapid link to policy makers
- ❑ Many voices calling for change

1. Ending discrimination
2. Access to quality care
3. Funding for research
4. Support for recovery

Lessons Learned

- ❑ Focus on science creates strength, builds hope and reduces stigma
- ❑ Organized advocacy will gain respect and allies at all levels of government
- ❑ Family and consumer voices can fuel important policy change
- ❑ Persistence is powerful

“The most important office in
America is that of private
citizen”

Justice Louis Brandeis