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**AMBHA: More People Seeking
Outpatient Behavioral Health Services**

(Washington, DC) – In its testimony before the Institute of Medicine meeting, Crossing the Quality Chasm – An Adaptation to Mental Health and Addictive Disorders, today the American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association (AMBHA) released new data that shows over a 25 percent increase in the use of outpatient professional services for behavioral health disorders for the three-year period from 2000 through 2002 – a trend that can partially be attributed to the gradual fading of the societal stigma associated with seeking mental health services.

“We wanted to answer the question of whether there had been an upward trend in the utilization of outpatient services,” said Pamela Greenberg, M.P.P., Executive Director for AMBHA. “Our survey was designed to present an industry-wide, data-driven perspective to validate isolated, anecdotal reports that have tried to quantify this increase,” she continued. “This survey provides a valuable summary of utilization trends for consumers across all regions of the country.”

AMBHA surveyed outpatient service utilization for more than 47 million commercially-insured behavioral health plan members. These enrollees received behavioral health services from professionals contracted with managed behavioral healthcare organizations (MBHOs) that accept complete financial risk for providing comprehensive behavioral healthcare services for fixed dollar per member per month rates.

Utilization of services is commonly measured by looking at the number of outpatient visits used per 1,000 covered members per year. In calendar year 2000 there were 295 visits per thousand members. Utilization increased by 15 percent to 340 visits per thousand members in 2001. In 2002 a further 10 percent increase led to 375 visits per thousand members. The average annual trend for this three-year period was a 12.8 percent increase in utilization of services.

“NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) is encouraged that this increase in outpatient visits is a promising sign that the stigma associated with mental illness is showing positive signs of erosion,” observed Michael J. Fitzpatrick, NAMI National Executive Director.

It should be noted that the professional services included in this survey were provided by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, and other licensed counselors. The outpatient visits counted in the survey include both psychotherapy services and the management of psychiatric medications.

“We consider this a positive trend,” noted Edward Jones, Ph.D., Chairman of the Board for AMBHA. “It is consistent with other studies that have found that a decrease in the stigma associated with receiving services for mental health and substance abuse problems can lead to an increase in utilization – showing that more people are reaching out to get the help they need before their problems get worse so that they can live fuller, healthier lives.”

AMBHA is a non-profit trade association representing the nation's leading managed behavioral healthcare organizations. These organizations collectively manage mental health and substance abuse services for more than 110 million people.