This conference took under scrutiny a problem that has now been well documented and wholly exposed. Its dimensions are of such magnitude that prior inattention to it can only be attributed to lack of power in those who suffer the problem. As one speaker noted, we are headed toward a time when one out of every four or five persons will be elderly; and the incidence of significant mental illness in the elderly has been running between 15% and 20%. The nearly total lack of planning and services for this soon-to-be enormous population of mentally ill elderly people led to the conference leaders inviting those attending to consider what actions might be taken to generate help.

Prior to the conference, a “Next Steps” Committee was formed to design a structure in which conferees could focus upon the steps needed to create a national effort on behalf of this population. The structure arrived at was a division of conferees into four groups, with each group considering a major topic, and reporting specific recommendations.

FORMULATION OF KEY QUESTIONS

It was a working premise of the Committee that substantial data and analysis of the problems had been done, and that action steps need not include further research, study, or data-gathering recommendations.

It was also recognized that in the process of deinstitutionalization of mentally ill persons, the elderly have special needs for housing and related services that are not widely recognized. Advocacy on behalf of such elderly patients is needed to protect and promote their interests. Accordingly, four topics were selected encompassing areas in which advocacy is needed. These four topics, together with the subtopics formulated by the committee, are:
Group 1. How can public opinion be mobilized through media and other means to focus attention on this problem?
How can the media be attracted to this issue?
What public information/dissemination strategies are needed to influence community decisions on housing facilities for this population?
What are the different roles each of the media should play?
What role can the media/public education campaigns play in fostering national organizations?

Group 2. What role can national elderly and mental health organizations play in advocating for the elderly on this issue?
What part should national organizations play? Is the best approach a confederation comprised of existing organizations, or a new group?
What can be done to foster House and Senate hearings?
What are the best strategies for influencing (1) regulations and administrators and (2) legislation and legislators?
How can existing national organizations be enlisted and become involved?
Is there a role for national and regional workshops and conferences?

Group 3. How can existing community groups and advocacy networks be directed to advocate on this issue?
How do you build a constituency for this population?
What can be done to foster public debate and public hearings on the subject?
How can existing community groups be enlisted/interested/involved?
What can be done to educate/influence administrators and legislators?
What other techniques have been used effectively to influence the community (such as simulated legislatures)?
What work needs to be done at the state and local level to build national organizations?

Group 4. What training and other information for professionals, volunteers and self-help groups is needed to encourage effective advocacy?
What are the advocacy training needs for those who work with this population?
How can the needs of this population be incorporated into existing advocacy training?
Who needs training?
What kinds of materials need to be developed?
What role could a national demonstration training center play?