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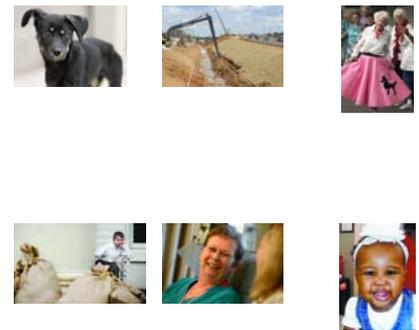
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Providing services that could prevent the next tragedy

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Posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 12:00 am

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This is not another editorial about guns.

It is not about 30-round ammunition clips, walking around Wal-Mart with a handgun strapped to a belt or challenging the power of the National Rifle Association.

This is an editorial about the one in 17 Americans who live with a serious mental illness, including too many who don't receive the help they need.

It is about a nation that slashed \$4.35 billion from mental health services from 2009-12 (The Record Journal) and now wonders why things went so wrong.

It is about mental health services, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and others who continually fail to connect the dots that could prevent another violent tragedy.

After the latest mass shooting, involving an apparently mentally ill man at the Washington Navy Shipyard, the National Alliance on Mental Illness is urging Congress and the president to act on pending mental health legislation. These bills have been bogged down since the debate over gun control collapsed earlier this year.

"It doesn't look as if anything will ever be done about stiffening gun laws, such as more stringent background checks, banning assault rifles and ammunition, but there are three impending laws on strengthening our mental health system, which is long overdue," said Betty Robertson, a north Alabama volunteer with the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

The bills include funding for programs that could help prevent some of the violence involving individuals who suffer from mental illness.

One bill would assist communities in connecting people who need help with the services available.

Another of the bills would restore the Medicaid funding that has been cut for community mental health centers.

It would provide services for up to 1.5 million Americans who have mental illness, including veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

A legislative priority should be training and communication between agencies to recognize when someone poses a threat and to provide mental health services to that person.

Officials of the National Alliance on Mental Illness say the Navy Shipyard tragedy shares common factors with other



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mass shootings in recent years.

"The common denominator is an individual struggling with mental illness, with other people being aware of problems, but no meaningful action being taken in time to connect the person with effective services or support," states a report from the alliance.

The case of Navy Shipyard shooting suspect Aaron Alexis exposes a new level of incompetence. Alexis managed to keep a military security clearance and obtain a gun despite obvious red flags involving gun violence and serious psychological problems.

This is not another editorial about the lack of courage in Washington to address gun legislation. It is about the immediate need for Congress to help communities provide services that could prevent the next tragedy.

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Posted in Editorials on *Monday, September 30, 2013 12:00 am.*

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THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED
3	4	5	6	7	8	9

An Evening with Theodore Roosevelt, presented by Joe Wiegand
 Decatur Public Library
 4:00 pm

Embracing Art : A Coming Together of Area Amateur and Pro...
 Carnegie Visual Arts Center
 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

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