



Driving Transformation in Mental and Behavioral Health Care Through Policy

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- In 2023, about 1 in 3 adults in MN reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression.
- The scarcity of mental health practitioners in rural Minnesota is causing significant access gaps.
- Medicaid reimbursement rates are below the total cost of care, creating financial and workforce difficulties for providers and health systems.

What is the issue?

The United States faces a national mental health crisis among people of all ages in communities throughout the country.

There are myriad contributing factors to today's mental health crisis but there was perhaps no more impactful a collective catalyst to the explosion of the country's mental illness burden than the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated massive loss of life and health, widespread fear of illness, economic and career impact, social isolation, and changes in the day-to-day life of Americans and people around the world.

Co-occurring with these staggering rates of mental health needs are enormous mental health workforce challenges.

Alongside an aging workforce, one of the key factors contributing to these challenges is the current Medicaid reimbursement rates in Minnesota. These low rates are leading to extended wait times and, in some cases, the closure of clinics, exacerbating access gaps.

Furthermore, mental health crises are complex and have unique needs that current crisis response services fail to adequately address.

Why is this important?

In 2021, a study revealed that nearly half of high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness over the past year, underscoring the ongoing and urgent need for mental and behavioral health services. Increased demand among adolescents, coupled with the already high need among adults and the mounting challenges within the mental health workforce, presents a clear call to action for legislators.

Failure to address these issues will only lead to heightened barriers to access and, consequently, increased healthcare costs.

Without adequate access to behavioral health services, individuals and communities will have no choice but to resort to seeking care in emergency departments, which not only strains resources but also causes significantly higher costs.

By taking action, we can ensure that all individuals, regardless of their location, have access to the high-quality mental health support they need. The time to act is now.

What should policy makers do?

- Address workforce shortages in rural communities by forming partnerships, offering grants, and providing scholarships. These initiatives will offer financial support and additional incentives to encourage mental health providers to relocate to rural areas.
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health services to prevent long wait times, clinic closures, and higher healthcare costs.
- Enhance and expand funding for crisis services by investing in law enforcement training, crisis stabilization centers, and related programs.

Sources

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