

The Detroit News

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Opinion: How more collaboration will improve mental health care in Michigan

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Published 11:00 p.m. ET May 4, 2022

Across Michigan, we have a mental health crisis. The effects of staff shortages, the COVID-19 pandemic, access to mental health care services and a growing caseload — particularly in pediatric care — mean too many Michigan residents can't access services.

And Michigan is not alone. This is a problem across the country.

Anyone who has experienced a mental health challenge themselves or alongside a family member knows the panic and frustration of having nowhere to turn. Access to services is an acute problem that has been growing in recent years. Unfortunately, the main solution in the past has been to take the loved one to the hospital or call law enforcement, where they don't have the staffing or facilities to deal with immediate or long-term mental health treatments.

There is one positive outcome to this mental health crisis: Our mental health care experts, advocates, stakeholders and government leaders are learning to be creative and develop solutions that will make a difference. We're encouraged that the governor and legislative leaders have also recognized the great need and are targeting funds to support these local efforts — and these dollars are the start to making a real difference.

As demand continues to increase, we need to attract more people into serving and treating those experiencing a challenge with their mental health and we need organizations and locations to provide help. Kent and Wayne counties are leading the charge to make positive change.

In Kent County, local government, the health care community, law enforcement and others have partnered to design a continuum of services to address the most critical needs. Plans include a crisis stabilization center equipped to accept individuals directly from law enforcement, plus expanded use of mobile crisis teams to respond alongside or in place of police and paramedics.

In Wayne County, leaders are working with Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network mental health officials to develop a one-stop facility where local residents can gain access and treatment at one location. An estimated 1 in 5 persons suffers from a mental illness.

Offering quality integrated behavioral health care services will help our communities, families and businesses become stronger and healthier.

We hope this year marks a watershed moment as more creative solutions like the ones mentioned above are proposed, funded and begin construction. The need is so great there really is no more time to wait.

In Michigan, we're used to facing challenges and finding solutions. We're so pleased to see state and local leaders coming together with the treatment community to address the challenges with concrete programs and solutions.

This makes us stronger as a state and will also help our local communities and families.