

Mental Healthcare is Vital for Thriving Communities

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Senator Smith writes about how we can respond to our mental health crisis with services that improve outcomes for patients and support safe and healthy communities.

MADISON - Overcoming the stigma of mental illness has long been our single greatest challenge in meeting health needs. The brain is the busiest and most complicated organ in our bodies and certainly the least understood. There's no way to fix this problem here in one column, but I want to emphasize the importance of combating the stigma associated with mental health struggles.

The good news is that the healthcare conversation has been increasingly responsive to mental health challenges in our communities. Now when we fill out intake forms at the doctor's, we are asked questions to give doctors insights into both our physical and mental well-being.

Governor Evers recognized this need when he declared 2023 the Year of Mental Health in this year's State of the State address. With many shootings occurring weekly around the country attributed to mental health crises, the urgency of addressing mental health struggles is an overwhelming problem.



Fortunately, Congress took steps to improve access to mental health resources, like implementing the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) , move us in the right direction. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, you can now call 988. Trained personnel answer this hotline 24/7 and they are there to connect you with life-saving resources.

There is more we can do. By state law, counties are designated with the primary responsibility for the treatment, well-being and care of unserved people with mental illness. If someone is diagnosed with a mental illness and needs treatment but is not covered by private insurance, the county steps in.

Programs administered by our county human services departments are required by statute to provide the community support programs that offer intensive care for adults that might otherwise need institutional care. They also provide emergency mental health services for those in crisis and adult protective services for the elderly and at-risk adults who are survivors of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Counties are the frontlines for our work to help those struggling with mental health, but the funding for our counties is critical to this end. Counties receive their funding through shared revenue payments to fulfill mental health care responsibilities.

