Florida’s Support for Mental Health Services Falls to 50th in the Nation

Florida’s support for mental health services falls at the bottom of the list in a ranking of all the states. Additionally, Florida has the third highest percentage of mentally ill persons who are also uninsured. The state must do more to meet the mental health needs of its people.

Esubalew Dadi
February 2017

Florida’s per capita support for mental health services ranks last among the states. In 2014, Florida provided just $36.05 per person in support of these services, less than one-third of the U.S. average of $125.90. Such funding ignores the following:

- The Florida Department of Children and Families estimates that there are 784,558 adults with serious mental illness in Florida, 330,989 children with serious emotional disturbances and more than 1.4 million children and adults who have experienced some level of psychological distress.

- One in two Floridians will experience mental illness. Further, the population of homeless, uninsured Floridians who have mental health issues is the third largest population in the nation and exceeds the national average.

- The 2017 Report of Mental Health America estimates that Florida has 594,000 uninsured individuals with mental health issues.

The chart below compares Florida’s support for mental health with the national average and with the state of Maine, which ranks first in the nation in per capita support.
Given Florida’s low level of support for mental health services, it is critical that the state take further action to help build its mental health systems. This is particularly important to growing the state’s economy, as the physical and mental health of residents is crucial for productive and sustainable participation in the labor force.

Medicaid can play a pivotal role, as it is the single largest source of funding for public mental health services in the country and underwrites the costs of health care, primarily for low-income persons and individuals with disabilities, including adults with severe mental illnesses in community treatment services. Further, Medicaid has offered a broader array of mental health services than is available through other kinds of coverage, including crisis response, prescription medication, psychosocial rehabilitation and a range of recovery support.

Untreated mental illness has significant fiscal consequences for state and local governments and exacts a high toll on the nation’s economy. It can also lead to costly and frequent hospitalization, institutionalization and recurrent involvement in the criminal justice system.

The state should redouble its effort to enhance both access to and the quality of much-needed mental health services for its residents, as good mental health is crucial to the well-being of children and families. Doing so would help to break the cycle of poverty, homelessness and incarceration often associated with mental illness. However, if left unaddressed, Florida will suffer tremendous economic and social costs.
1 National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Inc. (NRI-inc). 2014. *SMHA Mental Health Actual Dollar and Per Capita Expenditures by State. FY 2014 (Using Civilian Population).*


3 Ibid


7 Ibid

8 Supra note at 6, p. 1

9 Ibid