



Who is impacted by this issue?

Mental health and substance use disorders affect individuals from all segments of Wisconsin communities. One in five Wisconsinites experience diagnosable mental health symptoms in any given year and more than 230,000 adults have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness.

- ⇒ An estimated 18.44% of Wisconsin adults (807,000) have a diagnosable mental illness. An annual average of about 360,000 adults aged 18 or older with any mental illness (45.2%) from 2011 to 2015 received mental health services.
- ⇒ An estimated 21% of Wisconsin's children have a mental illness. Some children receive mental health services through other public systems or through private insurance, but a treatment gap of about 34% remains.
- ⇒ In Wisconsin over 900 people die by suicide each year, an increase of 40% between 2000-2017 – but only 52% had received mental health treatment at some point.
- ⇒ At least 30% of men in prisons and 60% of those in county jails have diagnosable mental health conditions.
- ⇒ Mental health conditions often co-occur with other chronic health conditions, and adults living with psychiatric disability die on average 25 years earlier than other Americans.
- ⇒ Opioids related complications resulted in 829 deaths in 2018 and 3,731 emergency room visits in 2019.

Why is this issue important?

Mental illnesses are treatable, and people do recover, even from serious mental disorders. However, untreated and undertreated mental illnesses can have a negative impact on an individual's physical, social and financial wellbeing. Mental illness impacts graduation from high school, lost workdays; add cost to the long-term care system; and when co-occurring with other chronic health conditions significantly increases mortality.

Individuals with mental illness can recover and manage their condition successfully. To accomplish this they need access to community-based, recovery-oriented, trauma-informed system of care which integrates mental health, substance use and primary care to ensure early identification and intervention. Recovery services and supports must be flexible and available to people where they live in the least restrictive setting appropriate to meet their needs and consistent with their choice. Community supports should focus on helping an individual to live as fully and independently as possible with the equal opportunities and quality of life.

How are supports for this issue funded?

Services and supports may include therapy, medication, psycho-social rehabilitation, peer support, benefits counselling, housing, transportation, and employment services. These services are funded by private insurance, as well as by Medicaid and Medicare. However, there is a continued lack of parity for funding and coverage of interventions needed to treat and recover from mental health issues which results in increased untreated or undertreated conditions. In Wisconsin, counties have the lead role in administering behavioral health services, including community programs such as Comprehensive Community Supports (CCS), Coordinated Services Teams (CST) and crisis services. Mental health is also addressed by public education services, including special education.



MENTAL HEALTH

What are major concerns related to this issue?

- ⇒ The lack of access to adequate, high quality community-based mental health treatment and treatment for substance use disorders has contributed to people being placed in costly out-of-home and institutional settings, being confined to jails, prisons, or involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- ⇒ Variations between counties in the amount and scope of services provided has led to inequity in services depending on where the individual lives.
- ⇒ Provider shortages limit the ability of children and adults to experience the full benefit of these programs. 49 of Wisconsin's 72 counties are designated as "Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas." This shortage is especially severe for people covered by Medicaid, or in rural areas. Access to psychiatric services, especially child psychiatrists is at a crisis point in much of the state.
- ⇒ People of color who experience mental health crises are disproportionately subjected to coercive and punitive responses including involuntary treatment, jail holds, and incarceration.
- ⇒ Wisconsin lacks linguistically competent mental health services for deaf and hard of hearing. More mental health providers able to communicate directly with people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf blind, through American Sign Language and other modes of communication, as well as knowledge of Deaf Culture are needed.
- ⇒ Children and youth with disabilities are overrepresented in the justice system. 2016 data from Wisconsin's Department of Corrections indicates at least 70% of the then current population at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake were classified as having one or more disabilities; most with a mental health diagnosis or emotional disorder. More attention and resources must be devoted to promoting best practices in youth-focused programming and positive policy changes that will improve outcomes for youth and their families.

How has this issue been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Many people with mental health needs are at higher risk of COVID-19 and related complications for a variety of reasons including instable housing, limited resources for social distancing, and a high incidence of co-occurring chronic health conditions. Therefore community mental health workers should be classified as essential workers and have access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), sanitation supplies, and testing.

Telehealth has become an important way to access mental health services during this time. Wisconsin Department of Health Services has provided additional flexibility to help consumers access telehealth services. This has exposed disparities and inequities for those who cannot access telehealth because of geography, equipment, internet access, fiscal constraints, ability or disability.

Studies indicate that the pandemic could have negatively impact children's physical and mental health, and yet parents don't have the appropriate mental health or counseling resources to help their children or themselves. Potential prolonged school closures and home confinement may mean that children who were receiving mental health services through schools or outpatient clinics may no longer have access to treatment.

