

2017 Issue Brief Behavioral Health

A strong behavioral health system that proactively supports the health and wellness of North Dakotans with substance abuse disorders and mental illness translates into reduced crime, stronger families and communities, fewer emergency department visits and inpatient days, and a reduced burden on society generally. These conditions carry a high burden of disease. By 2020, mental health and substance use disorders will surpass all physical diseases as a major cause of disability. North Dakota's behavioral health system has critical gaps including a lack of early identification and intervention services, difficulty in accessing services, a lack of consistent screenings for at risk populations, and a lack of, or barriers to, accessing community-based recovery supports.

Further compounding these problems, North Dakota does not have enough providers to address the growing need in our state for behavioral health care. In addition, the providers we do have are not evenly distributed across the state. We need to create incentives for people to become mental health providers, and to work in underserved areas.

Expand Access to Behavioral Health Services

An estimated 91,912 adult North Dakotans experienced some form of mental illness and 51,950 had a substance use disorder in the past year. Looking ahead, the need for mental health services will continue to grow. Prevention and early intervention are cost-effective ways to avoid the devastating effects of behavioral health disorders. Prevention efforts alone can yield ten dollars of savings in health costs, educational costs, criminal justice costs, and lost productivity. Prevention and early intervention need to be valued as priorities so that access to these services is more readily available.



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Why it's good for North Dakota

Studies show that people with untreated mental health problems visit a medical doctor twice as often as people who receive mental health care. In one study, researchers were able to show that patients seeking mental health treatment were much higher users of the medical system, with physical health care costs 200 to 250 percent higher than those not seeking mental health services. And outpatient mental health care can offset the costs of expensive inpatient care.

Good mental health is good for the community. Businesses benefit when employees have good mental health, which is associated with higher productivity, better performance, more consistent work attendance, and fewer workplace accidents. It is also good for families because good mental health supports our ability to have healthy relationships, maintain physical health and well-being, and make good life choices, which also reduce the burden on law enforcement and our judicial system.

NDHA position

NDHA supports legislation to increase early prevention and intervention services as well as expanded treatment and recovery programs.