



In 2006, Wyoming's mental health care system received a D grade. Three years later, it receives an F, a disappointment for a state that has sought to make at least some investments in mental health services in recent years.

Inadequacy in housing and workforce development, as well as few evidence-based practices under the state Medicaid program, are primarily responsible for the grade drop.

The Wyoming Department of Health's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division (MHSASD) contracts with a network of 15 community mental health centers in five regions (Central, Northeast, Basin (Northwest), Southeast, and Southwest) that serve the state's 23 counties. The Wyoming State Hospital in Evanston, the subject of past legal action over poor conditions for patients, is part of a separate division of the Wyoming Department of Health.

The legislature's Select Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has played an important role in identifying and prioritizing pressing needs in this sparsely populated rural state. In 2007, the legislature increased spending by \$18 million in an effort to meet those needs—but more is needed.

Wyoming has funded a crisis stabilization pilot program that has helped reduce the need for hospitalizations. Crisis stabilization services serve a vital role and are particularly needed given that Wyoming State Hospital is straining to keep up with demand. MHSASD is also collaborating with consumers, families, and other state agencies to promote a more coordinated, cost-efficient, and client-driven "system of care" approach to serving people with multiple needs. To raise public awareness, the state has held public hearings with a "listening panel" of government leaders in which consumers share their stories about the impact of lack of social acceptance and inclusion.

Wyoming has implemented a new outreach program that provides veterans with information and referral to mental health services. It has peer support specialists in several of the state's community mental health centers and supported employment programs in a couple of regions. Both efforts help promote recovery and should be expanded to all five regions.

Despite new investment, mental health services remain sparse and inadequate, with many areas lacking

Innovations

- "System of care" collaboration
- Veterans mental health outreach program
- Peer support specialists
- Crisis stabilization pilot programs

Urgent Needs

- Safe and affordable housing
- Expand crisis stabilization
- Workforce development
- Transportation

Consumer and Family Comments

- *"We have had one psychiatrist who has been with the mental health system for a long time. This psychiatrist is dedicated to the community. She is the best thing in our area."*
- *"We are a very rural area and it is not uncommon to have to drive 50 miles to receive help. When a person needs care, it needs to be available and that is just not the case in my community."*
- *"My employer (I was employed at a public mental health center) saw my improvement and offered me an opportunity of a lifetime. They asked me if I would like to be a peer support specialist."*
- *"My family member has had two involuntary commitments in the past five years. Both times, he was forced to stay in a local jail because mental health beds were not available in local hospitals or in the only state mental hospital."*

psychiatric care and reasonable access to needed services and supports. Safe and affordable housing and transportation are significant challenges—along with a shortage of mental health workers, particularly psychiatrists, and opportunities for workforce training.

Although conditions appear to have improved at the state hospital, there is still a need to integrate it with a statewide continuum of care. Without an array of accessible and effective services throughout the state, including jail diversion programs, Wyoming is likely to continue to face a high suicide rate and the significant costs of placing individuals with serious mental illnesses in hospitals or jails.

Simply put, Wyoming's F is an indication that the system is inadequate to meet the needs of its citizens. For progress to be made, greater investments need to be made and sustained over time.