

Rethinking the City of Chicago's Mental Health Clinics

Background

- The primary responsibility for providing mental health services to persons who are indigent rests with the state. Illinois has consistently under-funded its mental health system and that under-funding has gotten progressively worse in the past decade.
- The State's failure to provide adequate mental health services imposes substantial costs on cities and counties across the state, particularly Chicago.
- Chicago has operated mental health clinics across the city for decades. The clinics have been supported with both state and city funding.
- Many people have gotten high quality mental health services from the City clinics and those clinics employ talented and dedicated mental health professionals.
- Approximately 15% of the persons flowing through the criminal justice system have a serious mental illness. Most of the persons with mental illnesses who end up in the criminal justice system were not receiving appropriate mental health services at the time of their arrest.
- Chicago is the main destination for persons leaving state prisons at the end of their sentences.
- There is not a systematic process for insuring that persons with serious mental illnesses who are released from prison are connected to appropriate mental health services. This failure results in preventable recidivism and imposes substantial costs on our communities and on the Chicago Police Department.
- There is not adequate state funding to insure that persons with serious mental illnesses who are discharged from state-operated mental health facilities (or are discharged from private mental health facilities where their care was funded by the state) receive appropriate mental health services in the community. This failure results in preventable re-hospitalizations, unemployment, homelessness and even arrests.
- Approximately one third of the homeless population in Chicago is diagnosed with a serious mental illness. Most of this population is not receiving appropriate mental health services. The failure to provide these services imposes substantial costs on the city's human services budget..

Concerns about the City Mental Health Clinics

Despite the quality and quantity of services being provided by the City mental health clinics, this resource is not being used as effectively as it must be in the current difficult economic and budgetary conditions. Here's why:

- Chicago's mental health clinics have not sufficiently focused their efforts so as to maximize outcomes and benefits
- Chicago's mental health services are not sufficiently coordinated with the rest of the mental health system
- Chicago's mental health services are not sufficiently coordinated with other city services such as homeless services and law enforcement.

Recommendations:

- Focus the City's mental health services on reducing the involvement of persons with serious mental illnesses in the criminal justice system and on reducing homelessness.
- Use proven treatment models, such as Forensic Assertive Community Treatment teams, to provide services to people in the criminal justice system. Those services should be targeted to:
 - Expanding the number of city residents served by the mental health court at the Criminal Courts Building (26th and California)
 - Persons with mental illnesses in branch courts throughout the city. The City should work with the Circuit Court to create mental health courts in these locations
 - Chicago residents leaving Cook County Jail
 - Chicago residents leaving facilities operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections
 - Persons identified by the growing number of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained Chicago police officers
- Work closely with the Division of Mental Health to insure that Chicago residents leaving state-operated mental health facilities receive an appropriate array of mental health services.
- Work closely with city-funded homeless shelters to insure that those persons with serious mental illnesses in these shelters are connected to an appropriate array of mental health services.
- Work with other cities and counties in lobbying the State to fulfill its obligation to provide adequate funding for mental health services.

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