

Mental Health Blueprint



Policy Pillars to Improve Access to Care

OVERVIEW

Illinois is taking seriously its responsibility to increase access to quality mental health care, and this progress could not come too soon. The **Illinois Psychiatric Society**, representing psychiatrists and psychiatric practices across the state, offers this blueprint of policy pillars to drive conversations about where the needs are greatest in mental health care and how to address them.



Pillar 1 — Increase Equitable Access

All Illinoisans deserve quality, affordable, and accessible mental health care today. Illinois has fundamental access issues to mental health care, with minority and low-income families having some of the greatest needs and yet the greatest challenges getting those needs met.

We have made slow but important strides in reducing the stigma about receiving help for mental health issues. But now that more people are seeking care, patients have to either wait months to see a qualified mental health care provider or choose to receive care from providers with little or no psychiatric training. Neither is acceptable.

Illinois should address equitable access by:

- Promoting more collaborative care programs within primary care physician offices, to bridge the access gap with qualified mental health professionals
- Increasing telehealth access and improving telehealth laws
- Adding more residency training slots for psychiatrists within Illinois through dedicated funding, to ultimately increase the number of psychiatrists serving our state
- Offering incentives to mental health providers who agree to work in underserved areas
- Improving the support system for patients and providers: ensuring full parity for psychiatric treatment, streamlining prior authorization processes for medications, modernizing the mental health code to fit current standards, and working to improve the mental health court system

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Pillar 2 — Systems of Care

Just as patients have different, individualized mental health needs, our state's system is designed to provide many types of care to meet those needs. All of the options are crucial. They must be supported or the whole system will suffer.

To support our varied state systems of care in mental health, Illinois should:

- Improve and grow inpatient and outpatient care, specialized stabilization units, residential treatments, long-term care, drug and alcohol treatment, and other evidence-based treatment options
- Improve the coordination and communication between different levels of care. Patients often see different providers with special expertise along their mental health journey, and these providers need to have strong relationships with excellent communication to maximize treatment
- Improve the coordination and communication between state agencies and their partners in the private and public sectors
- Develop a universal medical records systems, increased reimbursement rates for mental health services, and use of peer systems to battle stigma and improve patients' care acceptance



Pillar 3 — Prevention

As with other forms of health care, preventing mental illness and reducing adverse childhood events, social adversities, and other challenges before they take hold is critical to pulling Illinois out of its current crisis.

People often wait too long to seek professional help. Rather than getting better, their condition becomes worse as they avoid treatment – out of fear, embarrassment, or denial. By the time they seek help, their needs are much greater than if they had sought help early on.

Illinois should promote prevention by:

- Increasing public education programs on mental health, to reduce stigma and offer community resources to those who are curious but do not know where to seek help
- Increasing screenings in pediatric offices and school settings. Similar to regular physical and dental screenings, introducing routine mental health screening early on in a young person's education will help normalize mental health care, reducing stigma, embarrassment, and other barriers to care. Early identification of mental illness and early treatment can also likely reduce the severity of symptoms as young people age.
- Empowering family and friends through these increased public education and screening programs, to support their loved ones and show them seeking help and embracing prevention is the best way to effectively treat challenges and live more productive lives