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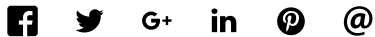
FEATURED

Little help available for those in need of mental healthcare

Sam Rolley | Special to The Times May 28, 2017



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Follow local news reports with an eye out for stories regarding mental health and two things will quickly become apparent: There's a growing need for mental health services and an ever-shrinking funding pool available to those responsible for providing help.

In today's news environment, stories about funding problems at mental health facilities are easily lost in the shuffle of politicization.

Obamacare's falling apart. Washington lawmakers are struggling to create a budget that best serves the most vulnerable while also protecting the nation's financial future. Alabama lawmakers are engaged in an ongoing and seemingly unwinnable effort to get the state budget under control.

These are the headlines that draw readers' eyes.

And then there are the headlines that do get attention relating to mental health.

A standoff between local police and a resident suffering a mental health emergency. An alarming increase in the number of suicides in the area. A growing inmate population with little evidence of a correlating rise in violent crime.

These issues share a common tie to deficits in the failure by government to provide certain vital mental health services to the people who require them the most, according to local officials.

It's an issue that Cullman's top law enforcement professionals discussed during a forum earlier this year, in the wake of a tragic event involving a resident in need mental health services at a time when options are becoming increasingly scarce.

Cullman City Police Chief Kenny Culpepper told members of the audience that even in situations where officers responding to a mental health emergency are able to help, they often provide only a temporary solution.

"Any law enforcement executive can tell you the cuts to state mental health and the closing of hospitals with longterm care rooms has pushed a lot of mentally ill people back into their homes, struggling to survive with no way to get help," Culpepper said.

The challenges officers face amid dwindling funding for mental health services was a lamentation shared at the forum by Cullman County Sheriff Matt Gentry.

"It's an issue that we're dealing with on a daily basis," Gentry said. "You have people with untreated mental illnesses and those who have drug-induced mental issues. Because there's no place for them to receive the treatment they need, they end up on the streets."

Equally troubling is the plight of Alabamians suffering undiagnosed mental illness who end up incarcerated because of a run in with the law. It's an issue that probably wouldn't receive a second thought from many residents if not for a class action lawsuit filed last year against the Alabama Department of Corrections. Plaintiffs in that case argue that the state is failing to provide adequate mental health services to inmates.

A potentially costly lawsuit is the sort of thing that gets legislative attention. Pending a judge's ruling, Gov. Kay Ivey is saying a special session to address prison concerns may be in the state's legislative future.

Still, other big problems related to mental health will remain unaddressed. Problems like the continuing lack of long-term treatment options for many Cullman County residents, or the fact that the county's primary provider of mental health services for people with the fewest options has operated under a stagnate budget since 2009. Both of these problems persist despite growing community need.

The lack of long-term care options and dwindling funding from state contracts for mental health services are problems that Mental Healthcare of Cullman Eexecutive Director Chris Van Dyke deals with on a daily basis.

"Everybody wants there to be quality mental health and addiction treatment services when they need it, or when their family needs it," Van Dyke said. "But nobody really wants to pay for it.

"The state doesn't really want to pay for it, the local government sees it as the state's job... and the individuals and families a lot of times either can't pay for it or also think it should be the state's job."

That's why when we hear about mental health care funding, it's either a report of hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of statewide cuts or a reminder that there's no money for funding increases."

Meanwhile, continuing uncertainty at the federal level isn't providing much reason for relief among Alabama mental health professionals.

Is there a solution? It may require mounting legal pressure, or worse, mounting tragedy.

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Two things: Check out The Delta Center. 2567373087, secondly, write your senator and congress and get them to vote to allow for reimbursement of Licensed Professional Counselors. Thanks.

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Why provide mental health care when you can just build a for-profit prison?

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1 day ago

I hope this was sarcasm...

Like Reply



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1 day ago

It was 100% sarcasm. Or rather it was a jab at our current state government's priorities.

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Tami Mac from Facebook

2 days ago

True. The entire state is so behind not just mental health, Medicaid, etc.

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Katie Wigginton from Facebook

2 days ago

Had a dr at Cullman Hospital tell me "You gotta suck it up" when I had my first panic attack and thought I was dying.

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Anne Searcy-Vaneman from Facebook

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This isn't new. The state has been this way for over five years. 'Here's a pill. Move on.'

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Not just Cullman, the entire country

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That's why we have so many self-medicating drug addicts

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HOVER FOR CIRCULAR

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SAVINGS

HOVER FOR CIRCULAR




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Cullman, AL
- FRI 2** **Rock The South Music Festival (2 D..**
Cullman Heritage P... | Cullman, AL
- FRI 2** **Cody Jinks**
Heritage Park | Cullman, AL
- FRI 2** **Gold City Quartet**
Civic Center | Cullman, AL



WED 31 THU 1 FRI 2 SAT 3 SUN 4 MON 5

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