

# Mental health crisis center needed for Montgomery

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(Photo: The Register)

Mental health is hard to talk about.

We are so willing to reveal so much about our personal lives in a world dominated by social media. Too many of us endlessly share detail after detail. Even our president, some worry, [can't stop tweeting without thinking \(https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump\)](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump).

Yet still as a society, including the River Region, we are cautious and hesitant to have conversations about mental health disorders and how they affect us.

We need to have a good, honest discussion about treating mental health. And we need to have a good, honest effort to provide more resources.

Since the Greil Memorial Psychiatric Hospital closed in 2012, officials have been trying to open a mental health urgent care center on Upper Wetumpka Road at the Montgomery Mental Health Authority. It could become a pilot program for other cities in Alabama to model.

Opening the crisis center is more than worth it. [As Advertiser columnist Kym Klass reported. \(/story/news/2017/01/27/crisis-center-could-save-hundreds-thousands-medical-jail-costs/96887670/\)](http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2017/01/27/crisis-center-could-save-hundreds-thousands-medical-jail-costs/96887670/) it's not cheap, and we know the money is a huge hurdle, with an annual \$3.1 million operational cost. But it will save hundreds of thousands annually at our hospitals and jails, which too often are treatment centers for the mentally ill.

With 74,072 adults who experience some type of mental illness in their lives, too many people are at risk without a more complete solution for mental illness in the River Region. Nearly 7 percent of our neighbors live with major depression, according to SummaSource at Auburn University Montgomery.

Consider this: There is only one mental health provider per every 1,305 mental health patients in the River Region. And there isn't a single mental health services provider in Lowndes County.

[Crisis center could save hundreds of thousands in medical, jail costs \(http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2017/01/27/crisis-center-could-save-hundreds-thousands-medical-jail-costs/96887670/\)](http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2017/01/27/crisis-center-could-save-hundreds-thousands-medical-jail-costs/96887670/)

Tolerating such minimal levels of care needs to end.

It puts too many people who are struggling with mental disorders at risk. It shows a lack of compassion for our neighbors and a lack of understanding of their battles.

San Antonio figured it out. Like Montgomery, the Texas city struggled with the mentally ill being regularly arrested for crimes. Thrown in jails and treated in emergency rooms, the costs were high.

They created the Roberto L. Jimenez M.D. Restoration Center in 2008, providing psychiatric care, counseling and rehabilitation to 50,000 people since 2008.

[Restoration Center: San Antonio's answer to mental health \(http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2017/01/27/restoration-center-san-antonios-answer-mental-health/96457170/\)](http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2017/01/27/restoration-center-san-antonios-answer-mental-health/96457170/)

The center saved more than 100,000 hours in law enforcement time and saved Bexar County taxpayers \$50 million, according to restoration center officials.

San Antonio is the model, but Montgomery can follow suit.



*(Photo: Albert Cesare / Advertiser)*

"I can prove treatment works," said Leon Evans, who led the opening of the center in San Antonio. "I do it through the criminal justice system. We focus our dollars on intervention points, catching these people before they end up in prisons and emergency rooms. We decided a person shouldn't be criminalized if they have a mental illness."

Our country's jails and prisons are the largest providers of mental health care in America. It doesn't have to be that way in Montgomery. The crisis center is the key.

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