

***League of Women Voters
Mental Health Position Recommendations and Updates March 2018***

Although some collaboration occurs in the community, there is a need to provide more opportunities for providers to meet, learn about, and coordinate their services. There are several concerns regarding consumers being able to access services.

Healthiest Manitowoc County and the Mental Wellness Coalition have been working to engage leaders in the mental health area to work together to identify goals and implement a plan to address them. The Improving Access to Mental Health Services Committee is working on access and strengthening services in the area of mental health and substance abuse. They meet on a regular basis and include administrative, decision making representatives from the County Health Department, hospitals, Human Services, other mental health providers, and the community. Some of the issues they have been working on include mental health clinics in the schools, mental health screenings in the schools, peer supports for students, identifying mental health providers and their specialties, identifying and evaluating current depression screening tools, vivitrol and suboxone programs, and possible grant opportunities to initiate and expand mental health programming. The committee is also interested in helping those coming out of jail with an immediate connection to mental health services and supports they may need.

In addition to the above committee, the Advocacy Committee for the Mental Wellness Coalition has also been working over the last several years to bring community agencies and mental health providers together to learn about Peer Support Specialists and how they can be incorporated into their services and programs. In addition to promoting Peer Support Specialists the committee is also focusing on addressing the underserved populations in our community, such as the youth. Our Human Services Department in collaboration with UW Extension and Lakeshore CAP have done trainings on and supported the Kids At Hope program and Trauma Informed Care treatment model, which is currently being used by many agencies and school districts in the county. The Manitowoc and Two Rivers school districts have been very involved with the Kids At Hope program and have implemented this program in their schools. In 2017, the League held a forum on children's mental health which included representatives from the school system and community providers. Manitowoc School System now has a mental health coordinator and mental health services available in the schools. The Two Rivers School District is also providing mental health services in their schools. There was also recently, a program on Bullying and Suicide Prevention presented by the education committee of the Mental Wellness Coalition to the Manitowoc County community.

One of the areas of concern identified during our League study was the lack of treatment options for clients with dual diagnosis. That seems to be improving. The League hosted a forum addressing this concern in 2016 and found that now most treatment program providers recognize the need to incorporate both mental health and addiction services in their treatment plans for their clients.

We have a very valuable resource in our community--Painting Pathways, which was mentioned over and over by those interviewed.

Since this organization is effective, it would benefit the community to help it grow its funding and services. Funding still continues to be a struggle for this agency.

There have also been new community programs, (Pathways to a Better Life, the Haven, and Hope House), that have started over the last few years that have worked collaboratively with other agencies to support clients who may have mental health and/or substance abuse issues.

Along with the above item, the idea of peer counselors was widely supported.

The Mental Wellness Coalition Advocacy Committee has had two presentations regarding Peer Support Specialists and how they can be incorporated into the local community. Two individuals received their certification and have been working in the community to provide support to citizens in our county. Training for Peer Support Specialists has been revised to include knowledge in both mental health and addiction issues. Several trainings are planned across the state in 2018.

Access to psychotropic medications and the means to pay for them is a barrier that has been overcome by other communities with a combination of coordination, accessing free or low cost drug programs, and some additional private or public funding.

This is one of the items being discussed and instituted as part of the Closing the Gaps to Mental Health Services Committee. Lakeshore Community Clinic now has an in house pharmacy to assist their patients.

In addition to these suggestions, there are some bigger steps that could be investigated. The first is the establishment of a community clinic which could serve uninsured and underinsured county residents.

The Community Clinic of Manitowoc County, which recently moved to a larger location on Calumet Ave, has been expanded and now treats individuals with mental health issues. They have their own mental health provider and Holy Family Memorial also provides a psychiatrist on site for 4 hours a week. Patients are screened for AODA concerns and are referred to area providers as appropriate.

As has been noted in this report, other counties such as Eau Claire have had great success with establishing drug treatment and mental health courts and are adding a second mental health court.

These specialized courts divert individuals with mental health issues from the jail system by providing treatment, positive reinforcement, and supervision. Although this approach requires a time commitment from key players and some funding, it has proven to be cost effective as well as having a positive impact on the individuals who come before the court. After receiving a grant for a treatment and diversion program for our area, Manitowoc County now has a Drug Court which is functioning well and already showing how successful this approach can be. The League supports this effort and praises the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and our county government for pursuing this opportunity. The League of Women Voters Mental Health Study group is now starting to look at the possible need for a mental health court in our county.

Other areas of interest and advocacy:

There is currently a bill being proposed in the Legislature that would allow children to access mental health services without parental permission, which will help those who are homeless, and others whose parents are unwilling or unable to see the need for mental health services.

Aurora Behavioral Health now has no waiting list for mental health treatment. They have 4 therapists and a nurse practitioner, so anyone who calls for an appointment can get in within 2 weeks. They also instituted triage spots each week for emergency visits. Their no-show rate has decreased significantly with a procedural change—patients now call for an appointment themselves rather than having it made for them.

Recovery coaches (individuals with a history of addiction recovery and certified providers) are now available at the emergency rooms at both Aurora Medical Center and Holy Family Memorial within an hour of an admission to offer services for overdose patients.

There are a number of new groups that have started, including a weekly "You Are Not Alone" support group for those suffering depression, Survivors of Suicide Loss, and Acute Loss Support Group. HFM is starting a cognitive behavioral therapy group for those with insomnia, and a group for parents with children with mental health issues started in March. Prevent Suicide Wisconsin is holding weekly facilitated groups at Valders H.S.; NAMI is sponsoring a presentation on depression by Dr. Carducci, and "Ending the Silence" about mental disorders, in schools and to families; Crisis Intervention training was taken by the Sheriff's office, and the Manitowoc Police Department will be taking it in October.