

Mental Health Treatment Access

Health Equity Council

Executive statement

Early recognition and treatment of mental health disorders is key to better long-term health outcomes for each individual. Hence, closing the gap caused by unmet need will improve the overall mental health of our community. A multi-pronged approach by the City and County, including education, recruitment, mental health screenings, and advocacy is recommended to promote access and utilization of mental health services.

Background

In Bernalillo County, 13.7% of adults over 18 report their mental health as being “Not Good” during at least 14 of the last 30 days. Nevertheless, of 93,000 adults statewide, over 1 in 20 of the total population, had an unmet need for mental health treatment in 2018-19 and of those, 35.6% (33,000) reported that they did not receive care because of cost.

In January 2022, SB-317 “No Behavioral Health Cost Sharing” became effective with the legislation designed to reduce the cost-barrier to mental health by removing the cost sharing for behavioral health care coverage of New Mexico residents. In order to access this cost sharing benefit, it is important to note that residents must be enrolled in group health coverage (this includes self-insurance.) Outreach by HEC shows that youth and recently incarcerated people are often unaware of this and believe that cost may present a barrier to treatment.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: SB-317 Outreach & Education

Focus education efforts on this demographic by creating a public campaign about SB-317. Encourage promotion of mental health services and prescriptions as copay-free to insured parties by 988 and other local hotline dispatchers, as well as local healthcare providers and correctional facilities.

Recommendation 2: Increase Mental Health Screenings

Schools and postsecondary programs, ERs, correctional facilities, and shelters should be encouraged to conduct basic mental health screenings, especially for the most common disorders, anxiety and depression. Those with moderate to severe scoring responses should be provided self-help and community support strategies in addition to a referral.

Recommendation 3: Provider Recruitment and Retention

Recruit behavioral health providers to Bernalillo County through loan forgiveness, grants for non-profit organizations to apply for one-time hiring bonuses, or other innovative recruitment and retention plans. The lack of providers is a bottleneck in a state where a shortage of behavioral health services is identified amongst the highest in the nation. Service providers should be available in languages that represent the population in Bernalillo County, including ASL.

Recommendation 4: Increased Utilization of Case Workers

Recruit more case workers to Bernalillo County through innovative recruitment and retention plans. Encourage psychiatric emergency providers, inpatient discharge coordinators, and ACS staff, to leverage this resource for those in crisis and recovery situations for increased advocacy and support.