



In 2006, Kentucky's mental health care system received an F grade. Three years later, the grade remains the same. Little progress has occurred, although there is potential for improvement.

The Department for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addiction Services (DMHDDAS) is part of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. It provides mental health services through 14 regional Mental Health Centers and four psychiatric hospitals.

The state has a long history of persistent rural poverty and limited funding of public mental health services. The community mental health centers haven't received a cost-of-living increase in their state contracts in 12 years. Due to lack of funding, mental health services are eroding, and centers have had to close programs and lay off staff.

Kentucky does have strengths, especially in the area of criminal justice. Building on a well-established program in Louisville, police Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) are expanding throughout the state. Lauded in 2006, a statewide telephonic triage system continues to screen jail inmates and provide linkages to treatment; the department recently received a federal grant to strengthen the system. The department also received a grant to develop a strategic plan for pre- and post-booking programs. The department provides a peer support specialist training program and a Peer Leadership Academy.

Community mental health centers receive department funds for a new statewide program called Direct Intervention, Vital Early Response Treatment Systems (DIVERTS) to specifically help reduce the number of persons becoming homeless or going to jail—as well as the number of hospitalizations and suicides. Each of the 14 regions worked with the Department to tailor the flexible DIVERTS program to its particular needs.

A new psychiatric facility to replace Eastern State Hospital in Lexington is on track to begin construction in 2010. The new hospital will replace the second oldest state hospital in the nation (opened in 1824). Kentucky's state hospitals have reduced the use of seclusion and restraints.

In some areas of the state there are forms of evidence-based practices (EBPs), such as supported employment, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), supported housing, and integrated dual diagnosis treatment

Innovations

- DIVERTS program
- Collaboration with consumer and family organizations
- Strengthened statewide jail triage system and criminal justice planning grants
- Reduction in restraints and seclusion

Urgent Needs

- Leadership and political will
- Invest in community services and evidence-based practices
- Workforce development, especially psychiatrists
- Supportive housing

Consumer and Family Comments

- *"Eastern State Hospital is the most depressing place I have ever visited."*
- *"They care and they listen. Even with their heavy workload, they make time for me when I need it."*
- *"No services available in rural areas . . . Need more psychiatrists and psychologists in rural communities . . . Beds not available in emergencies."*
- *"Resources are too few and far between."*

(IDDT), but none meet the standards of national models. The lack of supported housing is severe. The state has a shortage of mental health professionals, especially psychiatrists, in rural areas.

In addition to inadequate funding, the state's problems are the result of an imbalance in investment of existing funds: 62 percent of the budget goes to facilities and only 38 percent to community mental health services. This imbalance substantially limits progress.

Budget cuts only undermine an already shaky and insufficient infrastructure of community services. On a positive note, Governor Steve Beshear is aware of problems in the mental health care system and is expected to recommend to the legislature no further cuts to mental health services after a three percent reduction in 2009.

If Kentucky is to improve the quality of mental health services that it provides, greater political leadership and will is needed. Progress depends on sustained investment, with a greater proportion of funds dedicated to community programs.