



In 2006, Nevada's mental health care system received a D grade. Three years later, the grade remains the same. The state's citizens deserve far better.

Nevada has struggled to keep pace with population growth and demand for mental health services. Demand has grown most rapidly in the Las Vegas area. Tourism drives the state economy, and economic distress hits earlier and harder than in other states.

Although the state legislature increased mental health funding in previous years, over \$20 million in cuts in 2008 and an \$11 million cut in 2009 have resulted in closures of clinics, reduced services, and staff cuts in state hospitals and outpatient care. Deeper cuts are anticipated. The governor's biennial budget for 2010-2011 has proposed additional cuts of 10 percent or more.

Three state agencies, Rural Clinics (RC), Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS), and Southern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (SNAMHS) provide most of the state's non-Medicaid community mental health services. They are part of the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). RC serves 15 counties through a series of satellite clinics, while SNAMHS, which has a number of clinics and a centralized hospital, serves the state's major urban areas. NNAMHS, which evolved from a state hospital, provides an array of inpatient and outpatient mental health services. Medicaid-funded services are largely delivered by providers under contract with the Division of Health Care Financing and Policy (DHCFP) in DHHS.

Nevada's efforts to increase investment in the system prior to 2008 deserve some degree of praise, as does the transparency of its system in identifying serious needs. Its biennial needs assessment, for example, provides helpful information on the mental health care system, including spending comparisons and unmet community needs. This transparency is important, as Nevada's growth has led to significant stresses on the system, which is particularly evident in the large number of people with mental illness seeking help in emergency rooms. In response, the legislature funded the new Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas, which opened in 2006.

Innovations

- Transparency
- Urgent walk-in clinics and medication clinics
- Mental health courts

Urgent Needs

- Restore inpatient staffing
- Increased capacity for case management, medications, and therapy
- Supportive housing options

Consumer and Family Comments

- *"Southern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services is the Mental Health Agency that serves my family member. . . The wait can be as long as five hours in a tiny lobby."*
- *"The lack of mental health care in rural areas of the state . . . It is simply inaccessible."*
- *"The best thing is that Las Vegas has mental health courts. The illness is treated through the probation officer, the therapist, the mental health case worker, and the psychiatrist all working together."*

This acute care facility, coupled with a new urgent walk-in clinic model, provided needed relief for local emergency departments.

Nevada has also established Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, medication clinics, and recovery-focused clubhouses and certified peer specialists. These and other positive developments, such as mental health courts, where preliminary outcomes data show remarkable success in reducing jail days, need to be sustained.

Nevada's greatest challenge is to adequately fund mental health services, including supportive housing. It also needs to develop culturally competent services. Nearly 40 percent of Nevada's population is ethnically or racially diverse, yet Nevada's cultural competence plan lacks evidence of implementation or progress.

In a state with high rates of severe depression and other serious mental illnesses—as well as suicides—a strong commitment is needed to restore and expand the mental health safety net. Without one, Nevada will find its emergency rooms and criminal justice system overwhelmed—and costs being shifted to other sectors of state and local government.