



NEWS RELEASE:

A Strained Safety Net

Seems almost everyone these days is feeling stressed out, anxious and just plain worried. So why, at a time when addressing peoples' mental health needs is increasingly critical, are an overwhelming majority of individuals having difficulty finding mental health services?

Nationwide, community mental health centers are experiencing a 20 percent increase in demand for services, according to a recent survey by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. At the same time demand is increasing, mental health funding cuts are happening -- reducing services, closing programs, imposing hiring freezes, and cutting or freezing reimbursement rates for providers.

Access to mental health treatment in many parts of Missouri is limited. Many centers are struggling to manage existing caseloads. Pathways Community Behavioral Healthcare, Inc., a local community mental health center, works on a daily basis to get people the services they need, but often individuals must wait because of excessive demand and not enough funds to provide services.

The current state of community mental health centers -- the frontline mental health safety net -- is, well, depressed. Further limiting access to mental health services will only exacerbate a festering problem. "Every day we see more people contacting us for care. The community mental health safety net is under significant strain," said Mel Fetter, President/CEO of Pathways.

Abandoning people with unmet mental health needs puts additional strain on our local economies and Missouri's welfare systems. Cutting services results in many individuals ending up in local hospital emergency rooms. Without treatment, others will end up on the street or in jail.

As we continue to bail out some of the richest and most powerful corporations, banks and investment brokers, let us not abandon our most vulnerable citizens.

Pathways is a not-for-profit community mental health center. For more information about Pathways' programs and services, visit them online at www.pathwaysonline.org.

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