

Access to Mental Health Care

By Katie Welter



Quick Facts

Mental Health America

- In 2019-2020, 20.78% of adults were experiencing a mental illness. That is equivalent to over 50 million Americans.
- Over 1 in 10 youth in the U.S. are experiencing depression that is severely impairing their ability to function at school or work, at home, with family, or in their social life. 16.39% of youth (age 12-17) report suffering from at least one major depressive episode (MDE) in the past year.
- Almost a third (28.2%) of all adults with a mental illness reported that they were not able to receive the treatment they needed. 42% of adults with AMI reported they were unable to receive necessary care because they could not afford it.
- 10.8% (over 5.5 million) of adults with a mental illness are uninsured (MHA, 2023).



Impact to Client Outcomes



The highest barriers to healthcare access exist due to affordability. Those barriers are higher in those with mental health challenges (Coombs et al., 2021).

- The lack of mental health professionals and services can cause patients to suffer for months before seeing a provider. The cost of services may delay treatment time even further (Social Solutions, 2023).
- Limited education surrounding mental health may cause a person to delay treatment. They may not know something is wrong or play it down as being “lazy” or just “worried too much” (Social Solutions, 2023).
- Mental health has been associated with many disease risk factors such as obesity, low physical activity and smoking (Figueroa, 2020)
- The presence of mental illness can affect the ability of patients and health systems to manage chronic health conditions (Figueroa, 2020)
- Mental health disorders receive less attention than other medical conditions like cancer and cardiovascular disease (Figueroa, 2020)

This results in people who are chronically undertreated with mental health conditions. This in turn can lead to higher rates of substance abuse, poor quality of life, incarceration, unemployment, homelessness, suicide and unnecessary disability (NAMI, 2021).

Impact to safety



Barriers to mental health treatment can impact safety in individuals such as:

- Suicide
- Legal issues
- Family conflict - it influences people's relationships with their children, spouses, relatives, friends and coworkers.
- Unemployment
- Substance abuse (Social Solutions, 2021).

Barriers to mental health treatment can impact safety in healthcare professionals:

- Poor mental health impacts overall health by increasing the risk for chronic health conditions and poor management of patient's conditions. In addition, there is a greater use of healthcare services and demand on healthcare workers. This impacts burnout and the overall mental health of healthcare professionals (Figueroa, 2020).

Barriers to mental health treatment can impact safety to society at large:

- Incarceration rates are higher in those with mental health conditions that are left untreated (Jácome, 2021). Access to mental health services may be an effective way to reduce criminal involvement (Jácome, 2021).
- Unmet mental health needs have a negative effect on poverty reduction attempts and economic development. Those within poverty see higher rates of crime and drug use (Grinspoon, 2021).



Financial Costs

Societal & Individual

Good physical and mental health are essential parts of a productive economy, helping to create educated, productive workers. Poor mental health is connected to poor educational outcomes (The United States Government, 2022).

Additional costs to society from limited access to mental health care is increased homelessness and incarceration. Supportive services for the homeless and incarcerated leads to millions of dollars directly and indirectly affecting society (The United States Government, 2022).

Just anxiety and depression alone cost the global economy \$1 trillion dollars each year (The Lancet Global Health, 2020).

42% of the population saw cost and poor insurance coverage as the top barriers to accessing mental health care. 25% had to choose between mental health treatment and paying for daily necessities (The United States Government, 2022).



Mental Health Policy & Reimbursement



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Mental Health America **believes that when people get the mental health support they need, they can take on meaningful roles in their communities.** MHA fights to ensure access to treatment, improve quality of treatment, reduce homelessness, incarceration, discrimination and prioritization of mental health problems.

MHA's Policy Agenda for 2023:

- Access to and accountability for mental health care and supports.
- Equity.
- Financing and training of the peer workforce.
- Prevention and early intervention for children, youth and young adults.
- Suicide prevention and access to crisis care.
- Public health approach to mental health.

(MHA, 2023).

Reimbursement

There are many barriers in regards to reimbursement:

- State medicaid limits payments for same-day billing for a physical health and mental health service visit.
- There is lack of reimbursement for collaborative care and case management related to mental health services.
- There is an absence of reimbursement for services provided by nonphysicians, alternative practitioners and contract practitioners and providers.
- Medicaid doesn't allow primary care providers to submit bills listing only a mental health diagnosis and treatment.
- There are difficulties getting reimbursement for mental health services in school-based health centers.
- There is lack of reimbursement for screening and providing preventative mental health care. (Kautz, 2008).

Reimbursement

Continued

In 2003, the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, Transforming Mental Health Care in America, created these goals:

1. The recognition of mental health as integral to all health.
2. The need for "early mental health screening, assessment and referral as common practice"
3. The need to screen for mental disorder is primary health care across the lifespan and connect to treatment and supports. (Kautz, 2008).

Access to mental health is still limited: "Almost a third (28.2%) of all adults with a mental illness reported that they were not able to receive the treatment they needed" (MHA, 2023).

This is still showing that policy and reimbursement is not yet making the impact it needs to treat mental health the same as physical health and that this will still continue to impact Americans until a better solution is found.

The Role of the Professional Nurse



Nurses play a very important role in the assessment, diagnosis and care of patients with mental health conditions (Justin, 2023).

Being a nurse requires that you advocate for patients who cannot advocate for themselves so that those patients can live out long, full lives. Nurses also help emotionally support their patients by providing a comfortable environment to voice patients thoughts and feelings (Justin, 2023).

Nurses can advocate a need for change by having first hand experience with the population of people experiencing limited access to mental health. Working in the healthcare field gives a first hand account of how this hindrance impacts individuals and the population as a whole (Justin, 2023).

Professional nurses can be leaders who can speak out about the effectiveness of mental health care in regards to medications, and treatments. Nurses can educate patients and their families on mental health during their care and can also provide support and resources (Justin, 2023).

Ultimately, through educational initiatives and advocacy efforts nurses can help ensure positive outcomes for those living with mental illness (Justin, 2023).

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