

Behavioral health is still underfunded but we are making progress

It's been nearly 15 years since the passing of the Affordable Care Act and 17 years since the passage of The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. These two bills fundamentally changed Americans' access to behavioral health care for the better.

Nearly all of us have lived experience with behavioral health challenges and treatment, either ourselves and/or through our close relationships. Investment in research and services have expanded effective interventions and with Gen X leading the way, we have worked incredibly hard to reduce stigma.

This is not to say that we have achieved all of our goals. The behavioral health safety net system is still incredibly underfunded, leading to large pay disparities between professionals who work at agencies like CLR and those in hospital systems and private practice. Commercial health insurance plans and Medicare have resisted paying for home-based intensive integrated services like [WISe](#) and [PACT](#), care coordination, and peer support. This, along with archaic rules about who can bill those plans, creates barriers for many needing help.

The positive news is that law makers, with a big push from all of us, are starting to tackle some of these structural challenges through transformation like the [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model](#). I am optimistic that over the next five years we will continue to see policies and investments aimed at ensuring everyone has better access to high quality, affordable treatments.

While it is vitally important that we continue to advocate for access to treatment, I would propose that it is time to turn our attention to the most overlooked part of the health system, and that is prevention. In the [2024 Mental Health America "state of mental health" report](#), over 20% of Americans reported experiencing a mental illness, 20% a substance abuse issue and 2 in 5 high school youth reported feeling sad and hopeless in the last year. The World Health Organization estimates that nearly a billion people around the world live with a diagnosable mental disorder.

While the pandemic did us no favors – our sociologist colleagues warned us that COVID would have generational impacts and we will need to continue to focus on academic and social recovery for our kids and support the many among us who have new chronic health issues caused by COVID – rates of depression and anxiety have been climbing for a decade.

The US Surgeon General has outlined [several priorities](#) directly aimed at improving our mental health— including boosting social connection, addressing firearm violence, getting kids off social media (adults, too, frankly), supporting our "sandwich generation" of caregivers, and boosting our overall general health.



In 2021, CLR was awarded a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic SAMHSA expansion grant. This marked our formal transition to a whole-person care approach where we focus not only on behavioral health symptoms, but also physical health, nutrition, financial stability and housing, cultural connections, one's sense of purpose and connection to others. It is only by seeing our mental health as one element of our complex modern lives that we can support our clients and ourselves in sustained mental wellness. Washington State was recently awarded a SAMHSA CCBHC planning grant to ensure that the CCBHC model is made a permanent part of our statewide behavioral health system.

The experience of seeking services where not only do we trust you to be the expert about what you want and need, but are also interested in your whole life, not just your anxiety or your mood disorder, can be disorienting. Most of us have become so accustomed to each of our health care providers caring ONLY about the appendage or organ they are focused on.

Don't be surprised when you come to CLR and we want to talk about how much you are on your phone or how often you take a walk outside or what food you eat. We promise – no judgement – we are all living in the same complicated world that often asks of us the exact things that take away from our mental health. AND – as we have seen by fighting stigma and advocating that mental health be taken seriously as a health condition, we can change attitudes and policies.

Human beings are built to be resilient and to adapt as our world evolves – but at our core our basic needs remain the same. By taking a whole person approach to behavioral health our goal is not just to support you with the problem you are facing today but to help you build skills and knowledge that supports you for your whole life.