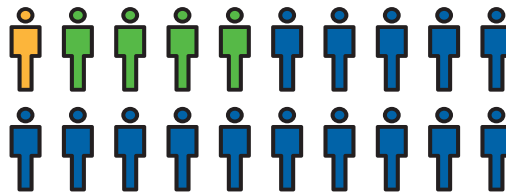# SUPPORT FOR IOWA'S
MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Iowa has made significant legislative strides in the past several years to improve mental health access. **But critical gaps remain in workforce and service delivery.**

As community providers continue to struggle with workforce, the number of individuals with mental health needs is not going away. It is critical that HHS, legislators, and providers combine forces to implement and expand new ways of serving Iowans with disabilities and mental health challenges.

1 in 5 people*

will experience a mental health condition this year

1 in 20 people*

will experience a serious mental illness

Source: NAMI National

THE ISSUES

- An increased demand for mental health services is outpacing the supply of providers.
- Many of the mental health professionals in the United States are nearing retirement age. Low counselor retention also means that as these professionals retire, they are not being replaced by younger professionals at the same rate, creating a shortage in the field.
- Clients, especially in rural areas, often have limited access to care because of a lack of public transportation or proximity to a mental health facility.
- Mental health providers often choose not to work in rural areas because of poor reimbursement rates and low pay. These factors can prevent people from getting the treatment they need.
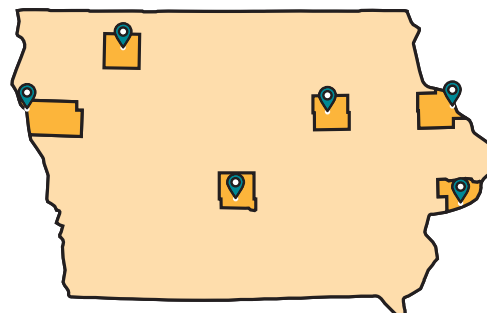
People per Mental Health Provider

LSI office location

IOWA

530 people : 1 provider

U.S.

340 people : 1 provider

Woodbury County 410 : 1
Scott County 600 : 1
Dubuque County 550 : 1

Polk County 320 : 1
Clay County 260 : 1
Black Hawk County 450 : 1

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LSI
LUTHERAN SERVICES IN IOWA

THE SOLUTION: SUPPORT HHS RECOMMENDATIONS

We appreciate HHS' efforts to listen to clients and providers to identify challenges and identify potential solutions. LSI strongly supports the following recommendations being put forth by HHS:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish reimbursement rate reviews to ensure staff wages/rates are market competitive.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Expand support for reimbursement of telehealth therapy services, offered via video and audio-only platforms.

Since virtual telehealth therapy services were approved in 2022 for Medicaid and Managed Care Organization (MCO) reimbursement, traditionally underserved populations -- those without adequate transportation, in more rural areas or low-income workers who work evening or overnight shifts – have benefitted the most from virtual therapy treatment.

22,372 therapy sessions
(June 2022 – November 2023)

LSI served 2,391 CLIENTS through telehealth

44% services delivered via telehealth (2023)

RECOMMENDATION 3: Reduce the number of Medicaid waivers and transition to needs-based rather than diagnosis-based qualification.

LSI Services for People with Disabilities (SFPD) serves approximately 95 Iowan children on mental health or disability waivers at any given time. Under the current waiver structure, providers are restricted to offering supports to individuals based only on their stated diagnosis rather than on what service or assistance is actually needed to increase independence.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Support HHS request to CMS to provide service modifications which allow individuals to live independently in their communities with limited support of Direct Service Professionals.

LSI is embracing the opportunity afforded by MCOs which allow providers funding for billable technology supports and monitoring. We are piloting a new program that allows DSPs to conduct virtual "check-ins" with individuals in their care, when appropriate.

DSPs provide virtual supports for tasks such as:

Confirming medications are taken on time

Answering questions about a recipe the client is preparing

Helping create a grocery list or budget

Additional modifications installed in client homes can provide safety features which increase independence for individuals needing services and send alerts to DSP staff on an as-needed basis, resulting in staff efficiencies for Home and Community-Based (HCBS) providers.