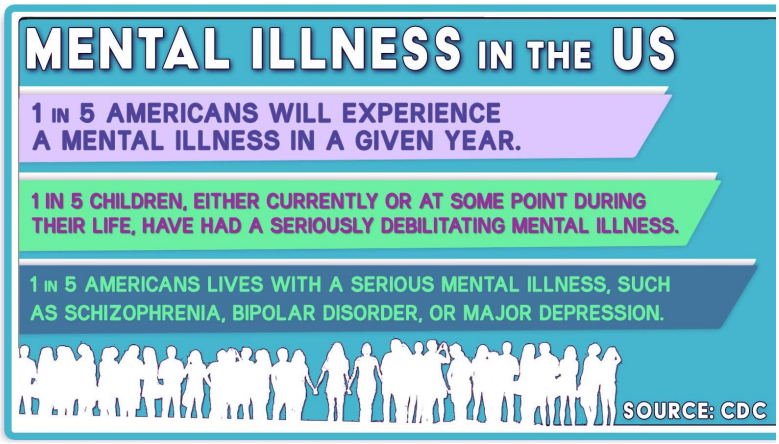
STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Arkansas House Newsletter

December 16, 2022

Mental and Behavioral Health in Arkansas



This week, the Arkansas Legislative Council received a report regarding the state of mental and behavioral health in Arkansas.

This report was months in the making. It makes clear that medical professionals are facing a mental health crisis in our state but the collaborative efforts involved in this study also provide a path forward to improving care.

Act 802 of 2021 required a study of Mental and Behavioral Health conditions in Arkansas.

The purpose of the study was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mental and behavioral health resources and care currently available in the State of Arkansas and to recommend legislation to the General Assembly.

For the last several months, legislators, mental health providers, medical professionals, and behavioral health stakeholders have been meeting to discuss various services offered to persons suffering from mental health

issues. The group has also been discussing the current difficulty is providing these services without a professionally trained workforce.

Representatives of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics testified that many pediatricians in the state are spending the majority of their day on working behavioral health right now and struggle to find access to proper care for their patients.

Arkansas Children's Hospital reported seeing a 25% increase in mental health and behavioral health cases since the beginning of the pandemic.

And medical professionals testified that more than 36,000 adolescents in Arkansas had a major depressive episode in the last year.

Arkansas is not unique in facing these challenges. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year. The CDC also states that 1 in 5 children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental illness.

The Department of Human Services participated in these working groups and discussed what could be changed by policy. As a result of the concerns raised in the working group, DHS agreed to several policy changes which will allow Medicaid providers to be reimbursed for more preventive care and provide more oversight for at-home care.

In the 94th General Assembly, we could see several pieces of legislation introduced as a direct result of this study.

The final report states that legislation is being drafted, studied, and considered which will address several concerns raised including increasing the number of Psychological Examiners practicing in the state, enhancing the availability to intensive treatment for young children and adolescents, and advocating for school counselors to be trained on suicide awareness and prevention.

You can read the study here.

We want to remind anyone struggling with a mental health crisis to call 988 to be connected to resources near you.