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## Stabenow: State's mental health outlook is improving | Opinion

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There's no question that the people of Michigan need better access to mental health care and addiction treatment. This is something I am laser-focused on.

For far too long, health care above the neck has been treated and funded differently than health care below the neck. And this inequity has real life consequences for Michigan families. Too many people with mental health challenges — including substance use — struggle to get the help they need every day. When people can't get help, the burden of care falls on our emergency rooms, our police departments, and our families.

That's the bad news. But the good news is we're making real, measurable progress in getting people the care they need.

Here in Michigan, we currently have 38 new Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) in communities from Detroit to Lansing to Muskegon to Benton Harbor and beyond. These clinics are changing lives.

The clinics provide high-quality services to anyone who walks through the door, including 24-hour crisis care, immediate screenings, risk assessments, diagnoses, and care coordination with health centers, law enforcement, and veterans groups.

The goal is to work with our local police to get people the care they need, not just house them at the jail or an emergency department waiting room. That is exactly what the CCBHC 24-hour crisis services are doing, and these services are strongly supported by local law enforcement where they exist. The goal is to provide these fully-funded, high-quality clinics in every community.

My bipartisan Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Act created the clinics and a nationwide demonstration initiative to fully fund them. This means that mental health care clinics will no longer depend on grants for their funding — funding that can start and stop. Instead, they are funded through Medicaid and other insurance just like community health centers.

There have been exciting results in the demonstration sites. That's why I am confident funding behavioral health as health care with high standards is the model that will transform care in Michigan and across the country.

The Department of Health and Human Services found that people who receive care at these clinics had a 72% reduction in hospitalization and a 69% reduction in visits to the emergency room. Previous research also found that clinic users saw a nearly 41% decrease in homelessness and spent around 60% less time in jails.

Meanwhile, one-third of Michigan's Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics are now able to provide same-day access to services. All of them are able to see patients within 10 days, which is a dramatic improvement.

Of course, not every mental health issue can be dealt with at a clinic. We know that Michigan needs more inpatient beds for behavioral health care. We've all heard heartbreaking stories about people — including children — experiencing a mental health crisis who wait and wait to get the inpatient care they need because there aren't enough beds and too often now, not enough staff.

State health officials recently increased payments to dozens of residential treatment facilities in our state, which should help keep beds open. Longer term, we know we need to build up our behavioral health workforce.

That's why I've introduced bipartisan legislation with Sen. Steve Daines of Montana to expand the mental health workforce. It includes additional funding to train psychiatrists and additional reimbursement and support for social workers and other health care providers in shortage areas, including rural communities.

There's still a lot of work to do. But Michigan is moving in the right direction. More fully funded clinics, more available residential beds, and more behavioral health care professionals mean more people will be able to get the help they need. And every additional person who receives care is a success story.

It's a child who can overcome anxiety and excel at school. It's an employee who can get help for opioid use disorder and stay on the job. It's families who stay together, and people who were thinking about ending their own lives finding hope and new reasons to live.

Mental health care is health care — period. That's something all Michiganians can agree on. I'm optimistic about the progress our state is making to ensure that everyone gets the care they need.

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