



# Illinois

In 2006, Illinois' mental health care system received an F grade. Three years later, it has advanced slightly to a D—which is not much to be proud about.

Illinois leads the nation in numbers of people with serious mental illnesses warehoused in nursing homes. This fact casts a pall over the state's entire mental health care system.

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health (DMH) is responsible for administering the system and has placed great emphasis on transformation. However, many people still do not have access to services, due to continuing state budget cuts in mental health services and agonizingly slow progress in converting the state's system for paying service providers from a grants-based model to a fee-for-service model.

DMH has emphasized the importance of implementing evidence-based practices in recent years and has made some progress. In 2008, 50 Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs were operating in different parts of the state, although concerns have been raised about whether these programs meet federal standards of fidelity.

Illinois also is making good progress on law enforcement training and jail diversion. Police Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs have been established in several cities. In Chicago, the CIT program, working in collaboration with community mental health providers, is a national model of excellence. Mental health courts exist in nine counties, and local mental health providers have worked closely with the courts to link individuals to services. DMH supports Data-Link programs in six counties that enable jails and community mental health centers to coordinate jail diversion and reentry services.

Additionally, Illinois is significantly investing in peer education and peer-provided services and supports. DMH has developed certification standards for peer recovery support specialists, with the goal of integrating them into the mental health workforce. The state also has established "Say it Out Loud," a multi-year education and awareness program designed to reduce stigma and discrimination and promote community acceptance for people with mental illnesses.

These areas of progress notwithstanding, Illinois' continuing reliance on for-profit nursing homes and segregated facilities known as "institutions for mental diseases" to house younger consumers is a major problem. A class action lawsuit is pending, alleging that the practice violates the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that people receive treatment and services in the least restrictive settings possible.

In addition to likely violating federal law, housing individuals in nursing homes for services makes no mon-

## Innovations

- CIT and jail diversion programs
- Peer education and peer supports
- Community education and awareness efforts

## Urgent Needs

- Invest in services that meet evidence-based fidelity standards
- End warehousing in nursing homes
- Address problems with the new fee-for-services system

## Consumer and Family Comments

- *"Illinois doesn't have a mental health system. Instead it has a few pockets of adequate services for some people, but there is little or no coordination among them. Access is murky and hard to find. Mental health services in Illinois are shamefully under-funded, and waiting lists are either long or closed."*
- *"The best thing about the public mental health system in Illinois is the amazing number of dedicated, caring people who work for very little pay."*
- *"What services? Only community-based agencies provide competent service and they are under assault by . . . bureaucratic incompetence."*

etary sense. No federal Medicaid dollars are available to pay for these expensive placements, so the state bears 100 percent of the costs. Illinois seems to have finally realized this and is beginning to invest in supportive housing. The state also needs to increase community-based, intermediate, and long-term care options.

After many years of planning, DMH recently converted from a grants-based system of financing mental health services to a fee-for-service system. The conversion has not been smooth. Providers report long delays in payment for services that threaten their ability to stay in operation. If programs are forced to close down due to lack of operating capital, vulnerable consumers will suffer.

Other problems exist in Illinois. Access to mental health care is very uneven, particularly in the southern, rural parts of the state. Due to low salaries and low morale, there are severe shortages of qualified mental health workers—a problem that is especially serious in the state psychiatric hospitals.

Although Illinois' grade has improved slightly from an F to a D, the state faces fundamental structural problems in its mental health service system. Further budget cuts will only compound them. If these challenges are not addressed quickly, even the slightest momentum for reform may be lost.