

One in seventeen Montanans suffers from a serious mental illness such as clinical depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In all these illnesses affect the lives of one-in-five Montana families. Serious mental illnesses are biological brain disorders that alter how an individual thinks, feels, and acts. Ninety five percent of suicides stem from these debilitating conditions.

While these illnesses are life-long conditions, proper treatment and support can help people affected by these illnesses recover and reclaim their lives. The unfortunate reality is that this treatment and support is primarily funded by state and federal governments, because the debilitating nature of these conditions prevents the people that have them from being able to afford private insurance.

The State of Montana is in challenging fiscal straits. Most likely some legislators will consider reducing state-funded mental illness treatment in order to save money. While this makes sense on the surface, failing to treat serious mental illnesses can end up costing the state far more in the long-run in increased mental illness crises, increased population at Warm Springs, increased incarceration rates, increased homelessness, and increased family services.

For instance, the cost of housing one patient at the forensic unit at Warm Springs is \$____ per day. It does not make fiscal sense to reduce cost-effective treatment in the communities when it will result in more patients filling the forensic unit beds in Warm Springs for decades.

As a legislator in this session, you have a challenging job with a lot of hard choices. Please consider the members of this Caucus as resources as you navigate through complex funding decisions regarding Montana's mental illness treatment system.

Sincerely,