



# Lawmakers, please don't lose momentum on mental health

By **Linda Krypel** | **Connie McKeen** May 21, 2020

The past two months have been stressful for all Iowans, particularly for children and families and that has put stress on our mental health resources.

Clinic mental health care services have been reduced and even eliminated in some Iowa communities due to the need to devote resources to patients with COVID-19.



*About 150 people attended the AMOS "Stand Up and Speak Out for Mental Health" legislative accountability session on Oct. 13, 2016, at the Neveln Center in Ankeny. (Photo courtesy of AMOS)*

Telehealth video counseling sessions are only available to those with Wi-Fi or unlimited data, and not all insurance companies reimburse providers the same rate for telehealth as for in-office visits. While Gov. Kim Reynolds proclaimed that telemedicine and in-office rates would be equal during the pandemic, this proclamation is set to expire the end of May.

Iowa entered this crisis as one the worst states for mental health care for adults; there are even fewer resources available for children. COVID-19 has greatly increased the need for mental health services for both adults and children. This need will continue long after the current outbreak.

As reported in the [Iowa Capital Dispatch](#) on May 19, Iowa counties, especially urban counties like Polk and Scott, were facing mental health budget challenges before this pandemic that will only be exacerbated. Gov. Reynolds has repeatedly vowed to push for mental health funding.

We need our legislators to act when they reconvene on June 3. **AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy)**, a non-partisan group comprised of 38 churches and non-profits) sent a letter signed by 45 clergy leaders from across Central Iowa to our legislative leaders encouraging them to include children's mental health funding in next year's

budget. AMOS has worked closely with the Iowa Legislature over the past several years to secure funding for mental health services across the state, with an emphasis the past two years on creating and funding a statewide system for children and youth.

The Legislature made great progress in 2018 and 2019 in reforming Iowa's systems of mental health care for children and adults. When fully implemented, Iowa's children and their families, indeed all Iowans, will greatly benefit from their fine work. With that solid start, the necessary next step is providing **adequate, predictable, sustainable** funding for the new system. We understand COVID-19 has impacted Iowa's budget, however mental health services for adults and children have become even more critical. In crafting Iowa's next state budget, we ask legislators to consider:

- Maintaining current funding amounts for adults and increasing funding for children's mental health crisis services to include a statewide hotline, provide for local mobile crisis services for children, and to provide crisis observation centers specifically for children;
- Lifting restrictions to enable dollar shifts in any region that has had insufficient funds to pay for adult and children's mental health prior to COVID-19 and now faces cutting services;
- Extending broadband so all people in Iowa can receive telemedicine services which includes mental health services;
- Extending the cutoff for telemedicine and the reimbursement rate. Mental health concerns (including COVID related) will not end when confinements end but will continue post COVID physical health concerns;
- Ensuring telemedicine reimbursement rates for mental health are mandatory for ALL insurers.

It is unquestionably true: Our children are Iowa's future. We must do all we can to ensure every child has an opportunity to maximize their potential. Improving mental health care for children leads to better long-term outcomes with increased education, increased employment, and fewer demands on the adult mental health system.

We call on our legislative leadership to make the mental health needs of Iowa's children a priority when crafting the 2021 state budget. It would be a shame to lose the momentum Iowa has gained at a time when mental health services are needed more than ever.

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