

**FLORIDA COMMISSION ON MENTAL HEALTH  
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

**REVISED FINDINGS**

- Florida’s mental health and substance abuse systems are in a state of crisis. Widespread, rapid change is currently needed in numerous areas. These include, but are not limited to, the following categories:
  - The criminalization of mental and addictive disorders has become a critical problem throughout Florida. Many persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders find themselves in criminal justice rather than treatment settings, often with long-term, negative consequences. We know how to divert these persons from punitive settings into emergency and community treatment, but local resources and diversion programs are far from sufficient to meet the critical demand.
  - Many of Florida’s children with mental health and substance abuse problems cannot access coordinated, individualized, affordable services. Ten percent of all children in our state have serious emotional disturbances, and 20% have diagnosable disorders. High percentages of middle school and high school students use alcohol and marijuana.
  - Florida’s booming elder population has a great and growing need for mental health and substance abuse services. One in five older Floridians may have a mental health or substance abuse disorder. These problems are frequently undiagnosed and untreated. Currently, tremendous unmet and unrecognized need exists, and Florida has no system in place to address this crisis.
  - Many adults and children have co-occurring mental and addictive disorders. This group represents a high degree of unmet need, and integrated services to address multiple needs are lacking.
- Mental and addictive disorders constitute a significant problem in Florida.
  - At any given point, about 17% of Floridians meet diagnostic criteria for a mental or substance abuse disorder.
  - These disorders cause nearly 22% of all health-related disability.
- Florida’s mental health system has changed drastically in the last 20 years, shifting from one characterized by centralization and a strong state policy to diffuse, fragmented multiple systems with many caregiving settings. Effective, innovative leadership is lacking. Traditional government and policymaking have not kept pace with these changes, resulting in the ineffectiveness of Florida’s current system.
- Owing to the lack of a comprehensive strategy and perspective for the overall system of care for persons with mental illnesses and addictive disorders, much of the management of the system is reactive and crisis oriented.

- No overall accountability strategy exists for the full mental health system that embraces all of the human service, educational, and correctional settings in which persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders are seen.
  - Resources expenditures across these systems are not counted in a systematic and comprehensive manner.
  - Data at both the state and local levels are unavailable or poorly integrated. New technologies exist that can better utilize available data by integrating existing information management systems to improve monitoring, accountability and, ultimately, outcomes.
- Florida's current mental health and substance abuse systems involve significant financial investments from federal, state, local, and private sources. While the exact amount of expenditures can not be directly calculated due to limited data sources, we estimate that nearly \$5 billion is expended in total mental health/substance abuse treatment costs, with nearly \$3 billion of this total in public funds. Nonetheless, owing to the scope of the problems and the fragmentation of the services system, many core areas are severely underfunded. When the system fails to serve appropriately, the cost is great.
- The diagnosis and treatment of mental health and substance abuse problems have improved dramatically in the last 20 years. Although effective treatments are available, they are not consistently applied systemwide. More than half of those with mental disorders do not receive treatment. However, with timely and appropriate treatment, many persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders can and do recover. It is estimated that only 20% of those needing substance abuse services receive treatment.
- People with mental and addictive disorders recover most effectively when they participate actively in their own treatment. The care of persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders should be based on a philosophy of self-determination; respect for privacy; and informed choices by consumers, family members, and caregivers.
- Research shows that prevention and early identification works. Certain strategies are effective in reducing illness and disability, but their benefits are not clearly understood and effective strategies are not widely utilized. Prevention is currently a low priority in Florida's mental health system, in contrast with deep end crisis interventions and programs.
- Mental and addictive disorders are still stigmatized throughout the state. Persons with these disorders frequently experience discrimination and misunderstanding. Stigma and discrimination represent significant barriers to accessing effective services.

