



## Ohio ignores Cuyahoga County's needs in behavioral health funding: William M. Denihan

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Plain Dealer guest columnist

By

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Mental health and alcohol and other drug addiction treatment services for the working poor have historically been treated as outcasts by the state of Ohio. Despite decades of professionals, family members and people who rely on the services advocating for adequate state funding, Ohio state government continues to ignore the needs of Ohioans and, more particularly, Cuyahoga County.

A 10-year analysis compiled by the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities shows that the Ohio Department of Mental Health's funding for community services to the uninsured has decreased by 70 percent from 2002, and the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services' funding for community services has decreased by 51 percent.

The shock continues as the Ohio Department of Mental Health is in the process of determining how to distribute \$57 million for community mental health services in fiscal 2013. Of that, \$47 million will be distributed in the same manner as fiscal 2012 -- using a flawed formula that does not take into account poverty and the prevalence and severity of illness -- leaving urban counties with next to nothing in state funding to provide for large numbers of people with the most severe illnesses. It is inexplicable that Cuyahoga, Franklin and Hamilton counties will receive less than \$1 million combined to provide community services to one-third of Ohio's population. Cuyahoga County will receive only \$232,209, or 0.5 percent, of the \$47 million and will have to compete for any additional state funding from the remaining \$10 million in fiscal 2013. Clearly, with 11 percent of the state population, Cuyahoga County should receive \$5.3 million.

The Kasich administration proposes that the \$10 million should be issued based on a competitive bid process among five regions of the state for special "hot spot" projects. This competition is supposed to increase collaboration



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*Dale Omori, The Plain Dealer*

*An inmate in the Cuyahoga County jail in Cleveland undergoes a mental health assessment in December 2006.*

between alcohol and other drug addiction and mental health services boards, but it will actually pit one county against another, urban against rural.

Cuyahoga County is in a crisis -- our safety net for people with mental illness and addictions is no longer intact. People are not being served by the community behavioral health system and are becoming more ill. When people with mental illness and addictions do not have medication or services, the entire community suffers with increased homelessness, emergency room visits, overcrowding of the criminal justice system and avoidable deaths. Tax dollars are being spent to provide more costly services through the criminal justice system and in the state mental health hospitals.

The Cuyahoga County Council and County Executive Ed FitzGerald provided some relief with an additional \$1.5 million to the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County 2012 base subsidy. This increase will reopen mental health intakes and restore some addiction treatment services. We are grateful for the assistance, but it is a small cry from the additional \$25 million needed to meet the behavioral health needs of Cuyahoga County's working poor that the state has ignored.

The bottom line is that the state of Ohio must acknowledge people with behavioral health issues and provide adequate funding to provide life-saving services to people in the community. Just \$232,209 out of \$57 million for community services fails miserably to address the behavioral health needs of Cuyahoga County.

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