

State plan would harm mentally ill people in Ohio's largest counties

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Once again, the Ohio Department of Mental Health has put forth a plan that fails to support the needs of the mentally ill who reside in Ohio's largest counties. Imagine living in Ohio's largest city and second-largest county, with a population of more than 1.1 million residents, and receiving no state support for community mental-health services. That's the Department of Mental Health's plan for Franklin County.



The failed policy continues as the department determines how to distribute \$57 million for community mental-health services in fiscal year 2013. Most of the money, \$47 million, will be distributed in the same manner as in fiscal year 2012 — using a flawed formula that does not take into account poverty, prevalence and severity of illness.

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. Franklin County will receive *zero* dollars, while Cuyahoga County will receive only \$232,209. Ashland County, with just 53,000 people, will receive more than \$1 million in community funds.

The policy is offensive, given what we know regarding disparities and inequities for minorities and mental-health care.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health proposes that the remaining \$10 million be distributed based on an arbitrary process between five regions of the state for special “hot spot” projects. This process is supposed to increase collaboration between boards for alcohol and other drug-addiction and mental-health services.

To do this, while ignoring the urban communities’ basic needs, is inexcusable. The proposed policy is not innovative; it is highly regressive toward people with mental illness in our largest cities.

When people with mental illness do not have 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.

It is ironic that the county that hosts state government and contributes so much to state government is zeroed out of funding for our mentally ill.

A policy that is based on exclusion of Ohio’s urban poor and allocates \$0 out of \$57 million for community services to Franklin County is a tragedy of immense proportions. The Ohio Department of Mental Health is charged with supporting all of Ohio’s mentally ill. Its policy fails the most basic test. I hope Gov. John Kasich will intervene.

DAVID A. ROYER

Chief executive officer

Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County

Columbus

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