



## Overview

### What is access to mental health services?

Mental health exists “on a continuum that begins in community and extends into health care.”<sup>1</sup> One way to think about access to mental health services is by using the “Framework for Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being,” which features three key areas.<sup>2</sup>

- **Community:** conditions that promote mental health and well-being like belonging and civic muscle
- **Care:** places where people receive treatment like health systems and workplaces
- **Coverage:** components of coverage like access and parity

### What is an issue profile?

Issue profiles briefly explore an issue by summarizing key background information and introducing potential solutions. Several recent community assessments identified access to mental health services as a priority issue for Spokane County. In December 2023, a group of 23 community partners convened to collectively build knowledge about this Spokane County issue. This document shares the results and can be used to develop improvement strategies.

### Why is access to mental health services a priority issue in Spokane County?

Since 2021, at least three community assessments identified mental health and access to mental health services as issues in Spokane County.

Assessment and Sponsor	Assessment Findings
<b>2021-2022 Spokane County Community Health Needs Assessment<sup>3</sup></b> MultiCare, Providence, Spokane Regional Health District	Poor mental health in adults was voted into the top four priorities. Spokane County has a mental health provider shortage for the general population and the low-income population. When looking at rates of mental distress by income, “adults with annual household incomes less than \$25,000 also had higher rates of mental distress (26.6%) compared to those with an annual household income of \$50,000 or more (7.3%).” Additionally, “since 2011, American Indian/Alaska Native residents had consistently higher rates of mental distress compared to other racial groups.”
<b>2022 Community Health Needs Assessment<sup>4</sup></b> Kaiser Permanente Washington	“Deaths of despair — those due to suicide, drug overdose, and alcoholism — are on the rise, and males, American Indian/Alaska Native people, and those who are unemployed are at greater risk ... Suicide rates in most Washington region counties are higher than state and national averages, particularly among American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian people, and 20 percent of students in grades 10 and 12 report having seriously considered suicide.”
<b>2023 Spokane County Needs Assessment<sup>5</sup></b> Priority Spokane	“... provide greater access to services/resources for patients with mental health needs” was voted as one of the top four priorities for Spokane County after calculating more than 1,700 votes.  “Adults reporting poor mental health through 2020 show a nearly 50% increase. It is likely that when the 2022 survey is released, the estimate will be higher than 17% of all adults.”



## Current Situation

Community partners explored current work, players, resources and potential barriers during a series of rotating discussions. This section summarizes the information they found the most promising or impactful.

Question	Promising or Impactful Information
<b>Current work</b>	<p><i>Inside county:</i> expanding Medicaid and billing for wraparound services, education around mental health careers for priority populations, education for the public about mental health (stigma, prevention and therapy), crisis lines, street medicine, educational institutions adapting pathways, increase in diversity of services, Mental Health First Aid training, mobile outreach</p> <p><i>Outside county:</i> expanding Medicaid and billing for wraparound services, education around mental health careers for priority populations, education to the public about mental health, on-the-job training approved for substance use disorders, legislative efforts</p>
<b>Community support</b>	Spokane County Library District, community or nonprofit organizations, people needing services, friends and family of people needing services (support systems), neighborhood councils, law enforcement, fire department, hospital systems, Washington State Department of Health, Washington State Department of Social and Human Services, Washington State Health Care Authority, schools, shelters, mental health agencies and providers, Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, CHAS Health, 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, NAMI Spokane, public schools, Vanessa Behan, Washington State Designated Mental Health Professionals
<b>Available resources</b>	State and local funding, nature-based services, veterans services, thought partnership, nonprofit services and programs, nonprofit staff, shelters, media for reducing stigma, peer support, BIPOC-focused services
<b>Potential barriers</b>	Mental health provider shortage, staffing, lack of diversity in provider pool, limited specialized services, high-barrier care, lack of culturally responsive care, stigma, lack of healthy foods and exercise, licensing, insurance, cost of services, cost of salaries and benefits for mental health professionals, ineffective use of non-licensed resources, reimbursement rates, transportation, supportive workplaces, unpaid practicums or internships, child care, unstable funding, high-barrier funding and gatekeeping

## Strategic Collaboration

Community partners identified opportunities for strategic collaboration and alignment across sectors by completing a survey about their organizations. This section shares the survey results.

### What values do community partners share?

Six values appeared in more than two community partner profiles. Strategies to increase access to mental health services may be more successful with these values built into collaborations and projects.

- Compassion
- Equity
- Integrity
- Community
- Stewardship
- Excellence

## What resources might partners be able to contribute?

Community partners most frequently selected staff time and expertise as resources they might be able to contribute. Resources with the fewest potential sources include child care and coordination with tribal government. The table below shows how many community partners may be able to provide each resource.

Resource	#	Resource	#
Funding to support community engagement	4	Staff time to support interpretation and translation	3
Food for community meetings	1	Staff time to support community engagement	7
Child care for community meetings	0	Lending interpretation equipment for meetings	1
Policy/advocacy skills	7	Staff time to support relationship-building between CHI staff and other organizations	5
Media connections	3	Staff time to participate in CHI meetings/activities	10
Social media capacities	6	Staff time to help plan CHI meetings/activities	3
Physical space to hold meetings	7	Staff time to help facilitate CHI meetings/activities	3
Technology to support virtual meetings	5	Staff time to help implement strategies	8
Coordination with Tribal government	0	Staff time to transcribe meeting notes/recordings	2

## What initial thoughts do community partners have about goals or strategies?

Four major themes appeared in community partners' initial thoughts about goals and strategies for increasing access to mental health services: barriers and blockers, capacity and organizing, community, and funding. Comments are summarized below.

Themes	Initial Thoughts
Barriers and blockers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce barriers</li> <li>Subvert blockers to work</li> <li>Destigmatize mental health</li> </ul>
Capacity and organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase cohesiveness of existing programs</li> <li>Increase capacity for providers</li> <li>Establish goals that people can organize around</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold space for vulnerable communities (like youth, BIPOC, non-English speaking communities)</li> <li>Involve the community in decision-making and ongoing conversation</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek funding and related resources</li> <li>Ensure funding transparency</li> </ul>

## Next Steps

A task force will convene in 2024 to increase access to mental health services in Spokane County through long-term, upstream changes. The group will develop community health improvement strategies, address root causes of inequity and

social determinants of health, and use strategic partnerships for sustainable impact. Their plans will be published in a community health improvement plan (CHIP) in late 2024.

To request the full data set, contact the Spokane Regional Health District Data Center at [datacenter@srhd.org](mailto:datacenter@srhd.org).

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