

## **Mental Health and Addiction Services Need a State Budget Now**

During the first week of May, Wells Center, which had been operating in Jacksonville for 49 years, closed. An article from the State Journal-Register in March stated that the center is owed \$1.4 million from the state for services provided since July of 2016, payments that are being held up due to the lack of a state budget and payment delays from Medicaid managed care organizations (who are experiencing delays in receiving payments from the state, as well).<sup>i</sup> The closure of the Wells Center results in hundreds of patients without a place to receive addiction treatment services and 36 individuals out of job.

The Illinois budget impasse has caused more than one million Illinoisans to lose access to critical services that protect their lives. That statistic in and of itself is riveting, but if we look below the surface, we find that 80,000 people have lost access to needed mental health services. Behind the numbers are real people. Twenty-three months without a budget is enough.

These are dire times as opioid use, most specifically heroin, has reached epidemic proportions. Since the beginning of the budget impasse, 24,000 fewer Illinoisans have received addiction treatment services. Our state has relied solely on a federal block grant to support prevention work, and as a result, our citizens in need of prevention services have been left in limbo.

Every day people with mental health and substance use issues end up on the streets, become homeless, go to jail or even die because they don't get treatment. They deserve the same compassion and attention as someone with diabetes receives.

The cost of untreated mental illnesses and addictions impacts all of us in the form of higher healthcare costs and the human costs that it places on society. Data from the Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics at the University of Southern California shows that Illinois has a high rate of hospitalizations of patients with serious mental illnesses, which in turn imposes a large cost on the healthcare system due to the relatively long length of stay despite the general absence of medical procedures.

It's time to get beyond politics and focus on the people. We cannot allow for the continued erosion of our safety-net system. The citizens of Illinois are relying on the officials they elected to serve them well. We urge all legislators to work together in pursuit of a resolution to this impasse. With the Illinois legislature scheduled to adjourn on May 31, the clock is ticking. We implore Governor Rauner and all Illinois lawmakers to come together to pass a budget that comprehensively funds mental health and substance use disorder services in Illinois.

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1) <sup>i</sup> <http://www.sj-r.com/news/20170310/state-budget-crisis-forces-jacksonville-drug-treatment-center-to-plan-closure>