

Mental health treatment topic of symposium

By Gazette Staff

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If you go

“Making Parity Real” will be held from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday, March 29, at the UAW Local 95 Hall, 1795 Lafayette St., Janesville. Attendance is free, but registration is required by Friday. For more information and to register, visit MakingParityReal.org.

Photo



Mike Sheridan

Photo



Photo by Terry Mayer

Rep. Kim Hixson

JANESVILLE — A statewide series on policy changes needed to improve mental health treatment in Wisconsin will make a stop in Janesville on Monday, March 29.

A panel of leading mental health and addiction treatment experts from Rock County and south-central Wisconsin will lead the half-day “Making Parity Real” session at the UAW Local 95 Hall.

Members of the public are encouraged to attend and share their views on how to improve mental health and addiction treatment coverage, access and outcomes.

Assembly Speaker Mike Sheridan, D-Janesville, will co-host the symposium with Rep. Kim Hixson, D-Whitewater; Rep. Sandy Pasch, D-Whitefish Bay; and David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute.

The symposium comes after last month’s report by the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism that found Rock County last year experienced a nearly 20 percent increase in suicide crisis contacts, such as phone calls and police interventions.

The report, published in the Gazette on Feb. 21, also notes that suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in Wisconsin and the second leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds. In 2008, 737 Wisconsin residents took their lives, the highest suicide level in at least 20 years.

Experts point to a lack of available mental health care, a high rate of binge drinking and easy access to firearms.

“Mental illness and addiction are treatable diseases—not character flaws, lifestyle choices or moral weaknesses,” Pasch said in a statement.

“By not treating these illnesses, we cause ourselves problems—in the workforce, in law enforcement, in health care settings—that we could avoid. Parity offers us an opportunity to solve some of these problems, but we must be forward thinking and strategic if we hope to build on that opportunity and make parity real.”

Panelists at Janesville’s symposium will discuss changes that can be made to state laws, budgets, rules and regulations and standards to increase access to mental health/substance use disorder treatment. Speakers also will include area treatment providers, advocates, members of the recovery community, consumers and law enforcement officials.

Riemer said in a statement the premise of “Making Parity Real” is to learn what problems must be fixed to ensure proper treatment is available.

“Based on information learned at this symposium and similar symposia in other locations statewide, the Public Policy Institute plans to present state lawmakers and policymakers with recommendations to close Wisconsin’s treatment gaps,” he said.

“Making Parity Real” is sponsored by the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative, the Grassroots Empowerment Project, Disability Rights-Wisconsin and the National Alliance on Mental Illness-Wisconsin.

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