

Community Mental Health has made big strides over the past 12 months in Michigan



MI Mental Health recaps CMH successes of the series' first year

JOANNE BAILEY-BOORSMA | TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2023

New partnerships, expanding programs with [schools](#) and [law enforcement](#), and the designation of 17 community mental health organizations (CMHs) as [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic](#) demonstration sites are a few of the highlights Michiganders have seen as CMHs continue to expand mental health services throughout the state.



CCBHCs welcome all county residents no matter what their income or insurance status.

Robert Sheehan, executive director for the [Community Mental Health Association of Michigan](#), says the biggest news is the addition of 17 CCBHCs to the state's demonstration site list. As of October 1, the funding status for these organizations transitioned from grant-based to permanent. This brings the state's total of CCBHC demonstration sites to 30.



Robert Sheehan, executive director of the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan.

Sheehan notes that most of the 17 are south of Ludington because one of the requirements is having a mobile team, which does work well in some of the state's [rural areas](#).

However, [Northern Lakes Community Mental Health Authority](#) (NLCMHA) has a [Mobile Crisis Prevention Team](#), and both NLCMHA and [North Country Community Mental Health](#) have developed pathways to providing [more access to](#)

[psychiatric services](#). With both the state and nation working to change the mobile team requirement, Sheehan expects CCBHC demonstration sites in rural areas to increase.

“The CCBHC program has been an incredible success,” he says. “That's all due to [Senator Stabenow's bill](#). She's the one that wrote that federal bill called the [Excellence in Mental Health Act](#).”

One of the 17 to receive demonstration site status – and also serves a rural community – is [OnPoint](#) in Allegan County.

“CCBHCs create a pathway to care for every person in the community regardless of their level of severity, whether it be a mild mental illness or a severe mental illness or a mild substance abuse disorder or a serious substance abuse disorder,” says OnPoint executive director Mark Witte. “It's really positive news and means that the services that we were trying to do, you know ‘the caring for all’ in our tagline, means that we are for the foreseeable future, able to do what we wanted to do forever, which is care for everyone.”



OnPoint staff and community leaders cut the ribbon to the organization's new facility.

OnPoint Sees Growth in New Facility

After eight years of being a dream, OnPoint's [new facility](#) opened on a main street in the City of Allegan. Among the facility's features is its [integrated space](#), which allows clients to receive primary care, psychiatric care, and counseling services.

“Having the new facility was really big news, too, as far as having a place where we can do the work and obviously be much more visible and much easier access for the community and connections across the street to [Ascension Borgess Allegan Hospital](#),” Witte says.

OnPoint also received a [Health Research and Service Administration \(HRSA\) grant](#) that allows the CMH to provide opioid medication treatment in Allegan County. Witte says this will be an additional option for people with substance use disorders to get care within the community as opposed to having to go outside of it to get care.

“We want to grow in that ability,” Witte says. “The HRSA grant allows us to build the capacity to eventually treat individuals with opioid use disorders along the entire productive array of treatment options that exist, such as the anti-craving medication, not just the ones that involve no medications.”

Opioid use disorder has been a focus of many CMHs as their communities consider plans on how to use funds from a [national opioid settlement](#).



Sanilac County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Michael Moore opens his new iPad.

Other areas have ballooned in growth

Sheehan notes another area of growth has been the partnerships with schools and law enforcement agencies.

“Post pandemic or even to the tail end of the pandemic, schools realized their students appropriately were depressed and anxious because their academic progress was halted or slowed, and parents were anxious,” Sheehan says.

Students also lost social connections. Schools have been hiring their own staff with pandemic funds along with reaching out to partner with CMHA and local behavioral health organizations. In turn, a much more robust referral network between health centers, community health centers, and schools has developed.

[Summit Pointe](#) has been helping schools in Battle Creek and Calhoun County by [providing wellness clinicians](#). [Washtenaw County Community Mental Health](#) (WCCMH) has been [collaborating with the Washtenaw Intermediate School District](#) to help fight against stigma and provide

mental healthcare to its students.

In the world of law enforcement, the range of mental health programs include mental health workers doing ride-alongs with police, crisis intervention training for officers, mental health workers going into jails, making sure appropriate medications are available in jails, and connecting those who are released from incarceration to mental health supports.

WCCMH, through the [Washtenaw County Public Safety and Mental Health Preservation Millage](#), has collaborated extensively with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office to [develop a number of programs](#) such as [LEADD](#), a crisis team, a co-response unit, a crisis negotiation unit, and programs in the court and jail systems. The [Sanilac County Community Mental Health](#) purchased iPads for the Sanilac Sheriff's Department to [assist road patrol deputies](#). These connect people experiencing mental health issues with trained social workers via video conferencing calls.



Summit Pointe's 24/7 First Step Psychiatric Urgent Care Center.

Building a Workforce Pipeline

Through several partnerships, CMHA also has been able to focus on another hurdle: the workforce shortage in behavioral health.

One reason for the shortage has been that students graduating with a bachelor's in social work often leave the field because they cannot afford graduate school. Through a partnership with the state, CMHA, the deans of all the Michigan graduate schools of social work, and the [National Association of Social Workers](#), the state included a program in its 2024 budget that has been dubbed the accelerated master's of social work financing system. Through this program, a candidate would receive a \$30,000 stipend to complete a master's in a year. The program would potentially add about 167 people to the field who would have a master's degree in social work, Sheehan says.

“We were finding that this generation – X,Y, and Z – care a lot about changing the world, but they often don't know what to do for a living to change the world,” Sheehan says. “By having them focus on this, they realize ‘Oh really, there's a thing called social work or nursing and I can do this thing.’”

A collaboration among the [Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity](#), [Michigan Department of Education](#), and [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) will help create awareness about careers in behavioral health that includes an educational piece on why human services, especially social work, is a good field to enter.

“As a system nationwide, we have to address the behavioral health workforce shortage,” Sheehan says. “It's what is causing delays. It is what is [causing kids and adults to sit in emergency rooms](#). This is what is causing waitlists for basic psychotherapy or psychiatry.”

Joanne Bailey-Boorsma has 30-plus years of writing experience having served as a reporter and editor for several West Michigan publications, covering a variety of topics from local news to arts and entertainment.

Photo of call center by John Grap.

Photo of Robert Sheehan by Roxanne Frith.

Photo of Washtenaw County CMH by Doug Coombe.

Photo of Sanilac County Sheriffs Department by Liz Fredendall.

Photo of Summit Pointe Urgent Care by John Grap.

The MI Mental Health series highlights the opportunities that Michigan's children, teens, and adults of all ages have to find the mental health help they need, when and where they need it. It is made possible with funding from the [Community Mental Health Association of Michigan](#), [Center for Health and Research Transformation](#), [Genesee Health System](#), [Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan](#), [North Country CMH](#), [Northern Lakes CMH Authority](#), [OnPoint](#), [Sanilac County CMH](#), [St. Clair County CMH](#), [Summit Pointe](#), and [Washtenaw County CMH](#).