

Study identifies gaps in child mental health care



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(Photo: File photo 2015)

Parents who've grown frustrated and exasperated with trying to get mental health services for their children are on the way to getting more than sympathy for their plight.

A consortium of major players from business, education, social services, government and health care will recommend on Thursday that the region develop a systematic way to identify youngsters' behavioral and mental health needs and streamline how parents get help for their children.

In addition to calling for coordination of services, the Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes also will call for more practitioners with appropriate training.

Many of the details — including funding — will be worked out in the coming months, said John Urban, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, which commissioned a study to quantify the situation.

"When people understand the depth of the problems, they will understand that there are no quick fixes," he said.

As a first step, [The Children's Agenda](http://thechildrensagenda.org/), a nonprofit that advocates for evidence-based approaches to supporting children and families, will organize parents, professionals and concerned citizens to address key issues identified in the study.

The plan and the [report, Crisis in Care: Gaps in Behavioral Health Services Are Failing our Children](https://www.scribd.com/doc/296874667/Crisis-in-Care-Gaps-in-Behavioral-Health-Services-Are-Failing-our-Children), are scheduled to be presented Thursday to community leaders whose influence will determine how the suggestions become reality.

Urban said that to the best of his knowledge, this is the first concerted effort on the topic. "That's one of the reasons we stepped into this. No one else was systematically looking at the issues."

The genesis of the commission was the Greater Rochester Health Foundation's work in elementary schools and child-care settings and the experiences of people associated with the foundation.

"We kept anecdotally hearing things that at first we just didn't believe," Urban said. "Kids as young as 3 being expelled from child-care settings because of behavioral problems. And schools having tons of issues with behavior issues ... in kindergartens and grades 1, 2 and 3. We did a little digging around and we found that indeed it really is an issue. It affects about 15 percent of kids in the region. The other thing we found was no one was really addressing this."

Last April, the foundation commissioned a study by the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

According to the research:

- In any given year, up to 20 percent of children between ages 2 and 18 experience a mental disorder and the prevalence appears to be increasing.
- Of children with a diagnosable behavioral health issue, only 1 in 5 will see a mental health provider. Many who do receive treatment do not receive it soon enough.
- Culturally appropriate care is nearly impossible for people of color.
- Quality of care is inconsistent.

As for a timeline, Urban said that by late spring he hoped [The Children's Agenda](http://thechildrensagenda.org/advocate) would have a list of willing advocates and a priority of issues.

"There will be incremental improvement," he said. "We have no illusions. This will be a long haul."

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(<http://www.thechildrensagenda.org/advocate>)

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