

# A Better Way Forward

## Real Solutions for Mental Health Care Access in Illinois

ILLINOIS  
PSYCHIATRIC  
SOCIETY

A DISTRICT BRANCH OF THE  
AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION



“Doctor, Jane is here to see you.”

“OK, go ahead and send her in.”

Jane has been seeing Dr. Smith, a family care physician, for many years. Recently, she has shown signs of mental illness that Dr. Smith has seen before, but usually only in patients who are much older. She complains of neck and back pain, but has not been exerting herself physically in ways that could explain the problems.

Until recently in their rural part of Illinois, the best Dr. Smith could do is offer a prescription to help manage the pain and suggest she consult with a psychiatrist. Jane, like many patients, would be unsure and apprehensive. It wouldn't help that the nearest mental health professional is more than two hours away. She either wouldn't call for an appointment or would back out.

But today, thanks to Illinois' new Psychiatric Collaborative Care Model (fully implemented in summer 2022), Jane will get the help she needs: painlessly, and right there in Dr. Smith's office.

He introduces Jane to his qualified Behavioral Health Manager,



Kristin. Kristin collaborates with both Dr. Smith (in-person) and experienced and caring, Chicago-based psychiatrist, Dr. Thomas (remotely.) Together, this 3-person health care team works to connect physical and mental ailments while helping to ease patient apprehension about seeking mental health care. In one discussion, Kristin learns Jane is dealing with emotional trauma that she did not initially

share with Dr. Smith. Kristin then consults with Dr. Thomas and Dr. Smith to determine a treatment plan. Their new collaborative care patient-provider relationship will help Jane immensely – all in the comfort of Dr. Smith's office. So much more could be done to improve access to mental health care in Illinois, if we can actually focus on real solutions.

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## Telehealth

We are just now starting to harness the power of connecting patients with expert care providers online. COVID-19 had many devastating effects on our health care system, but it did wonders for telehealth. Patients now are more comfortable “meeting” with their health care professionals online, and the technology and medical discipline is advancing so quickly it is becoming commonplace – and preferred for patients who live many miles from their doctors.

In one study involving patients at OSF HealthCare serving patients across rural parts of Illinois and Michigan, the results of a telepsychiatry program were overwhelmingly positive:

- **91 percent** of respondents to surveys after their tele-care experience said they felt heard, understood, and supported by the provider in their sessions
- **84 percent** strongly liked or liked having appointments over live video
- Wait times for care dropped **75 percent** — from six months to six weeks — through just 24 hours per week of telepsychiatry care

## Collaborative care

As in the example above, primary care physicians can use the new model to provide psychiatric treatment to their patients in their primary care office after consultation with the Behavioral Health Manager and psychiatrist – and have it covered by health insurance. This reduces mental health stigma and removes important road blocks for patients who need care but do not seek it, without compromising the quality of care they receive from gold-standard providers.



## Psychiatric residencies

The training pipeline for new psychiatrists has been chronically underfunded for years, and 100% of Illinois psychiatry positions typically fill. However, there are not enough positions for everyone who wants to become a psychiatrist in the state, leaving many medical students scrambling to find positions in other states. Think of the progress that could be made if Illinois would invest a fraction of the millions – even billions – of dollars it has received in COVID-19 relief funds to follow the allocations for training, loan forgiveness and other financial incentives for physicians, nurses, and others in the health care profession.

Illinois has taken important steps to invest in a better future for mental and behavioral health care. More work is needed to provide quality, safe, equitable care for all who need it.



LET'S WORK TOGETHER  
FOR BETTER MENTAL  
HEALTH CARE IN ILLINOIS.