

Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of:
Kym Lamb, Board Chair
Richland County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board
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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, good morning.

My name is Kym Lamb and I am the current Board Chair serving on the Richland County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning.

As a member of the Richland County Mental Health & Recovery Service Board I accepted the responsibility and honor of being part of the planning, funding and evaluating entity of alcohol, drug and mental health services for my community.

Our volunteer board works diligently to determine the types of services our residents need and deserve. Through assessments, community input and strong organizational relationships we consistently review, evaluate and audit delivery of services and outcomes.

We identify successes and also gaps to provide the most effective level of care. We contract with public and private agencies for a continuum of care starting at prevention going through crisis with the goal and expectation of recovery.

Our county is 120,000 people strong. We currently provide services to 10% of our population. Geographically we are broken up into a unique urban center with many rural communities requiring us to exercise good discretion in serving their diverse needs without sacrificing one groups access over another. We know barriers to care such as location and availability of services greatly impacts a person's ability to recovery. We have created effective sharing of services with and for bordering counties to limit unserved areas.

Like many of our fellow boards we are in the fight on behalf of our citizens against the current Opiate epidemic. In 2016 we lost 62 of our citizens. In 2017 & 2018 our death tolls lessened to 45 each year and we are thankful for this reduction, but our overdose rate is still too high. While we are making gains, we must continue to focus on not just the symptoms but the causes.

As I already mentioned our board is not just responsible for helping people with drug addictions. We must balance our efforts in treating addiction AND mental health. We are now experiencing a startling rise in suicides from 16 in 2016, 20 in 2017 to 22 in 2018. Many of our loved ones are not only suffering with addiction but they are fighting a battle on two fronts.

We should not be shocked by this. Data indicates that has high as 40% of those addicted have an associated mental health diagnosis. Continuing to support funding for prevention along with physical and mental health services is our best defense and our greatest ally.

In our county we practice and promote a trauma-informed recovery-oriented community of care. We focus on what our community members have gone through, what has happened to them rather than what is wrong with them. We know that the overdose or mental health crisis started long before the outward symptoms. We train our agencies on and encourage not just a language but an environment of help and hope. We know people coming through our doors are exhausted, overwhelmed, afraid and stigmatized.

And I know this because I have experienced it.

As I stand in front of you today and convince myself I am here in a professional role, as the chair of our board, as a business owner, as a community member, as a parent - I am ultimately here as a person with lived experience.

I have the rare opportunity to speak to you not just for my neighbors but for my friends and MY family.

Mental Health has come a long way.

In 2006 my care did not run smoothly or very effectively. I was left with confusion, frustration, anger and hopelessness. It was this experience that forced me to advocate for change and education. I was not satisfied with a terminal diagnosis I was given.

I'm encouraged that in just over a decade, mental health is being seen as the physical brain issue it is. That we are changing our language and focus of care. That we are offering a holistic approach to a whole person crisis.

I have to admit though, I stand before you wondering how you now view me. How much credibility just went down the drain when you found out I have lived experience. How your experiences determine how you would interact with me differently now.

Stigma doesn't go away because we see a sign that tells us it should. Stigma goes away when we see people going against the stigma. Making us question if what we believed is true or maybe it's time to rethink what we know.

When asked to join the board 4 years ago here was my response and I believe it wholeheartedly today.

Knowledge, Experience and Wisdom are nothing unless they are shared. This is the community that I live in, have a business in and share life with family and friends. It is important to me to contribute to my community and be part of a team dedicated to encouraging recovery and restoration; providing tools, training and people focused on building up the individual but also their families. Coming alongside those in need. Giving help to those that feel helpless and infusing hope to the hopeless. In doing so we strengthen the fabric of our community and inevitably enhance the lives in our local reach.

This is the job we still have left to do.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. At this time, we're happy to answer any questions you may have.