

Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Questionnaire

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Please describe your experiences with the behavioral health system?

I am the daughter of a psychiatric social worker who worked at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Like many Michigan families, our family has been impacted by mental illness. As a result, I have first hand knowledge of the behavioral health system. As a former Calhoun County Commissioner serving on the Human Services Committee and as a member of the Community Mental Health Board, I understand the system from an economic and philosophical viewpoint.

What role do you think community mental health (mental illness and developmental disabilities), and substance use disorder services fit into overall health care?

Community Mental Health plays a vital role in overall health care. In the 1970's and 1980's, with the closing of the of state hospitals, VA psychiatric centers, our community became the "depository" for numerous clients that were sent to "group homes" on the Northside of Battle Creek. Historic homes were converted into half-way houses for the mentally ill, developmentally disabled, pre-paroles and a litany of other state funded agencies.

Because the living conditions were less than ideal, I organized a Town Hall meeting so that area residents would have a better understanding about what was happening in our neighborhood. Speakers from the nine agencies who were housing "consumers" addressed the large audience, answering questions and concerns.

Much has changed since the 1980's. We have come a long way in Calhoun County, but there is much more that can and must be done. Under the leadership of Erv Brinker, Summit Pointe has had a positive impact on our community.

What do you believe the state of Michigan can do to expand access to CMH (mental illness and developmental disabilities) and substance use disorder

services for Michigan's citizens?

We need to have a more open dialogue about Mental Illness and understand the impact it has on families dealing with the disease. If a family member has cancer, everyone is sympathetic. If they are Bi-Polar, etc, everyone keeps them at arm's length. We need to "treat" the entire family rather than isolate the "customer". In an effort to insure confidentiality, we have created many misunderstandings about the many "faces" of mental illness. A series of PSAs would be beneficial to educate the public and hopefully dispel their fears and misunderstandings.

How would you balance the state budget?

Reduce costs, create greater efficiencies so all departments are adequately funded.

Please list your top three priorities you hope to accomplish in office?

The ability to adequately enforce Michigan's campaign finance laws is a concern. Emerging technologies and evolving tactics from advocacy groups are pushing the limits of our campaign finance laws. Unfortunately, from a resource standpoint, the campaign finance arm of the Secretary of State is understaffed. Most of the responsibility for pursuing campaign finance complaints falls on one full-time administrative law examiner, though other staff attorneys sometimes assist. That results in delayed rulings. I will look for ways to shift department resources so that the campaign finance area has the support it deserves.

Equally important is the need to preserve the integrity of the ballot. Michigan cannot rest on its laurels. Ensuring accountability for third parties that register voters and allowing local election officials to clean their voter lists by creating an "inactive voter" file are just some of the steps that should be taken.

Finally, declining financial resources coupled with ever-growing state and federal mandates compound the challenges of improving customer service. I will review the entire agency from top to bottom with a critical and creative eye. By establishing partnerships with stakeholders and lawmakers, we can find more efficient, cost-effective ways to serve the business community and everyday customers.