

Do Your Research Before Heading to the Polls

MACMHB Guest Op

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Voting is more than a civic duty; it's the obligation to choose a leader that will stand up for you and your community in local, state or federal government. With campaign season in full swing and the general election approaching quickly, we are inundated with campaign commercials, billboards and promises of change. But while discussion of jobs and the economy are dominating the political discussion, it's important to find out how a candidate stands on other important issues- including mental health and developmental disabilities.

Lawmakers at all government levels have a hand in policy-making, which directly impacts funding for much-needed mental health and developmental disability services. Because of this, it's crucial that candidates understand the needs of the mental health and developmental disability community and plan to support beneficial policies if elected. Mental health is an important part of the healthcare debate that can't be forgotten, making a candidate's position and willingness to advocate are important.

Mental health and developmental disabilities are not typically part of a campaign platform, but that does not mean a candidate does not have a position on the issues. A candidate that is not supportive of behavioral healthcare is not someone the mental health community wants in office. Taking the time to attend candidate forums and meetings to find out a candidate's position on the issues is an important part of being an educated voter. You can also communicate with candidates and find out their positions by visiting the website for each candidate in your area or calling their campaign offices to find out their position on these important issues.

Michigan's community mental health system has taken severe hits in the last several years due to drastic budget cuts. Find out what candidates believe the state of Michigan can do to expand community mental health services or substance use disorder services for all Michigan residents. Also asking candidates how they feel community mental health and substance use disorders fit into overall healthcare will help determine if they will advocate for mental health as much as physical health care. Parity between the two is an ongoing battle in our field. Michigan is one of only eight states that has still not passed statewide parity legislation, ensuring that mental health disorders are covered equally by insurance companies as physical health problems are.

As voters, it is our responsibility to elect policymakers that will take a strong, supportive position on these issues. Since one in every four Michigan residents suffer from a diagnosable mental health issue at some point in their lives, we need to do our research and vote for candidates who will fight for expanded funding and parity for mental health treatment. A list of all candidates and their positions on behavioral health care if they have shared it is available on MACMHB's website at www.macmhb.org.