

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers

June 9th, 2023

Cantwell Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: [Audio Begins] this region, but it speaks to what people in the community need to do to come together, to put a fine point on the crisis, and to call out the fact that we need more services for mental health.

This is an important first step what he's doing. But as he just mentioned, we need more help from the federal level. So, I definitely want to thank Katrina and Kim for being here. And I also want to thank my colleague, Senator Stabenow for being here, because she is the true champion of [Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers] and I'll let her speak in a minute.

But I just want to point out that she is also here to listen to farm economy issues as she is busy in the next month writing a farm bill, which is a great part of our state's economy, too. So, we're glad she's visiting both Western and Eastern Washington on this trip.

But today, we're here to address a very vital issue for all Washingtonians. And that is, we need more access to mental health care. We have made some progress as I mentioned, but we need to do more to build more capacity around our state in mental health, so more patients can get access to care.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Washington needs an additional 154 psychiatrist providers to meet the needs of our state's mental health. We only have one mental health provider for every 360 people in our state, we have less than 25 psychiatric beds per 100,000 residents. Just to give you an idea, the national average is 39. So, we're at 25, the national average is 39. It's something that we need to fix.

The problem was made worse recently by the closure of the 137 bed Cascade Behavioral Health Hospital in Tukwila. And here in Seattle, people are struggling with mental health conditions, as we heard from one of the people speaking to us before, finding a provider, then providing access to care, then having the continuity to that care.

So, the problem is made worse in our rural communities. Almost half of our counties do not even have one psychologist or psychiatrist in their community. That is why we needed to find innovative solutions to this complex problem and I'm excited, as I said, to be joined by the national champion on this issue of expanding behavioral health capacity. Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan.

Senator Stabenow has led the charge and I've worked with her over the past, I hate to say it Debbie, for almost a decade, this is how long we've been working to establish Certified

Community Health Behavioral Clinics. Senator Stabenow, as I mentioned, has been the national leader on this in creating capacity at the local level.

I love the way you said it's just about adding scale. This concept is we have some facilities, but they are gatekept by the number of providers they have, and the number of services. By us at the federal level layering on additional resources, they can expand capacity and see more people.

So that is why we're here today to talk about why we need that capacity. Nationwide, these [Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers] have served over 2.1 million people. And among those patients, studies have shown these results, a 74% reduction in hospitalization, a 68% reduction in emergency room visits, and a 33% decrease in homelessness. So, we know that Community Behavioral Health Clinics Work, we just need to add more capacity.

Starting in 2014, when Senator Stabenow originally authored this legislation, we were able to put in about \$1.1 billion and some people got grants to access that program. And they put into implementation the works of this.

Senator Stabenow just recently also worked, and I worked along with her, to get an additional \$8.6 billion added to this program. And that's why we're here today. Because we are saying that we want clinics and individual providers across the state of Washington to apply for these grants to help build capacity in our state.

Washington has received 17 of these Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic grants and funding from Spokane to Bellingham, to Vancouver, but they can't do this on their own. We're here this morning to encourage this clinic, which really doesn't need any encouragement, they want to apply. But we're here to say that there is more than \$8 billion on the table nationwide and please, let's apply for this.

We also needed to have our state apply for a state grant application. This would give our state the flexibility to certify these clinics faster and get more capacity built in a shorter period of time.

Winning these grants would allow the state to provide more integrated care through the state's health care delivery system, and it would get care to more places in our state that are needed most. So, I believe Washingtonians deserve, and should get easy access to mental health care.

So, I look forward to continuing as was this model called very innovative. This very innovative approach to adding capacity at the local level. I'm now honored to pass the microphone to my dear friend and colleague, Senator Stabenow.

Stabenow Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#)

Sen Stabenow: [Audio Begins] When she's got a great idea, I'm backing her up. When I've got a great idea, she backs me up and the two of us are moving forward. Innovation and particularly in healthcare, and particularly in community behavioral health care.

And Katrina and Kim, thank you. I mean, I'm listening to you...And you know, when I first started complaining that we only do that behavioral health care through grants and why isn't it funded like that, like health care, like we fund physical health care. Wherever we fund the mental health care, like physical health care, it was just an idea.

So, we had to put in place a demonstration project and show that it worked, but to hear your words, and oh my gosh, it just means so much to me. It really, really does. And I am so impressed that you have gotten the CRISIS dollars, that you are doing impatient, you know, it really is a continuum that we need.

But I want to go back for me, because I use this all the time, I noticed you talked about President Kennedy. In 1963, the last thing he ever signed, the last law he ever signed before his death was the Community Mental Health Care Act. And the vision was to stop housing people in hospitals that couldn't get quality, community care, close to home.

Give people the quality care that they needed, close to home.

Well, the first part of that happened the hospitals closed. The second part of that comprehensive community care didn't happen until now. We are fulfilling the vision that J.F.K had all these years ago.

And in fact, it was on the 50th anniversary of his signing of that bill this that Senator Roy Blunt, my Republican partner, and I went to the floor United States Senate to introduce this legislation. And to indicate how we need to fulfill that promise, which we now have.

Now, we've got a lot of work to do. And this is where your Senator is the champion. 17 clinics, great! There's more to be done.

And there's really two pieces of this. And this is very, very important because we put in place startup grants, with full requirements on the comprehensive nature of the treatment. But the second piece is to fully roll all of these clients into permanent Medicaid funding, health care, not grants and such and such. Health care. Which is the second piece of as that also Senator Cantwell is talking about, that involves the state coming in, to be able to get that Medicaid funding as well as the enhanced funding that we have provided larger match than normal in terms of the Medicaid piece of this.

So the goal is to fund health care above the neck, the same as healthcare below the neck, that is the goal. So that we are funding behavioral health clinics the same way we fund community health clinics.

And in Washington state where there is a federally qualified community health clinic, they are receiving full funding for the clinic, through Medicaid, as well as other insurance. Up until now

that has not been available for community behavioral health care and so this really is why I considered it a movement. I consider this is a transformation. This is one that we have to keep going until everyone has access to it.

And the reality is, as Senator Cantwell was saying, the numbers initially are astounding. In the past, the jail and the emergency room were the de facto mental health services. Right? That's it. I mean, despite all the wonderful work you're doing, if somebody went to jail who shouldn't have been there, but needed help or they sat in the emergency room.

So now fewer people in the emergency room, fewer homeless, fewer people in the hospital and the other number is that we have 60% fewer people sitting in jail. So, some of our biggest partners have been law enforcement.

The way we were able to get the funding that Senator Cantwell just talked about, which is the largest funding for behavioral health care effort in the history of our country. The largest Medicaid increase since the Affordable Care Act is because we have police chiefs, we had sheriffs, we had people in the communities that were saying we want help. We know when we go to a situation where someone needs mental health help. They shouldn't be in our jail, they should be getting crisis services. They should be getting the kind of care they really need.

And so law enforcement are very big partners for the past in getting this over the line, which is why when we were talking about the gun safety bill, and saying we should do something on mental health. We raised our hands and said "No, actually we have something here that is working"

And people were willing because it was evidence based as they were willing to actually proceed.

So that's really where we are now. Now it's fully implementing it. Because we have 17 clinics and Senator Cantwell, she's on it in terms of more, and more, and more. We have 500 clinics across the country now, we have 10 states that are in the form of full Medicaid funding, Washington State needs to be next on to be part of this. And then we're going to be able to say to everyone, that you're going to be able to get the care you need without stigma.

I have to say, I saw some recent numbers in Michigan that I was thrilled about; a third of the time, anyone who walks into the clinic is seen the same day. And everyone is seen within 10 days. And so, we are talking all colors. It used to be Medicaid, were trying to see severely mentally ill patients, sort of one by one, right?

We had to figure that out and now it's funding the clinic. Anybody who walks in, anybody who needs care, working with our hospitals, working with law enforcement, and saying to folks that it's okay to ask for help, it's okay to ask for help.

Because we know even before the pandemic, one out of five people in our country would have a mental illness in their lifetime. And the largest number of people dying under age 50 is drug overdose.

So, and I will end by saying, for me, this has been a passion. I have lived this in that I grew up in a small town in northern Michigan, where my dad when I was in middle school started showing signs of being bipolar when we didn't have that diagnosis. Nobody knew what it was. There was no medicine. My mom was Director of Nursing at the hospital, so she had the latest of everything there, but there was nothing other than a whole lot of stigma.

And so now we know that chemical imbalance in the brain, you can take medication, you get the help you need you go on and live your life. And that's what we want for everybody. So, I want to thank Senator Cantwell, I'm here because she is the person standing by my side that has pushed this through. So, thank you.