

## Mental Health in Rural Communities



May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and **Kearney County Health Services' Senior Life Solutions** is spreading awareness of the challenges of receiving mental health access in rural areas. While mental illnesses have a similar prevalence in both rural and urban environments, the circumstances and access to treatment look different. [\*The National Rural Health Association \(NRHA\)\*](#) tells us that rural residents face more obstacles in obtaining behavioral health services. As a result, distinct mental health differences are seen rurally compared to urban residents.

Studies have also shown that the risk of suicide is higher in rural areas, making it that much more vital that individuals seek out and have access to help. [\*The Rural Health Information Hub\*](#) states, "suicide rate is near twice as great in the most rural areas of the U.S. compared to the most urban areas."

Figuring out a solution starts with identifying the problem. [\*The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)\*](#) highlights the following barriers to receiving mental health care in rural areas:

- **Lack of Privacy** – "Individuals living in rural locations commonly identify a lack of privacy as a barrier to receiving treatment.
- **Lack of culturally appropriate treatment** – "Culturally appropriate treatment accommodates clients' beliefs and practices, preferred languages, individual and family histories, differences in symptoms, and preferred approaches to treatment."

- **Lack of Services** – "Even when individuals living in rural locations want treatment, they may have few services and providers in their areas, and they may have less access than urban residents to evidence-based practices (EBPs)."
- **Lack of Practitioners** – "Rural areas have few behavioral health practitioners, particularly ones who are qualified to provide specialty treatment or EBPs. More than 75 percent of all U.S. counties are mental health shortage areas, and half of all U.S. counties have no mental health professionals at all."
- **Evidence-Based Practices** – "Some research shows that behavioral health facilities in rural areas are more likely than their urban counterparts to be independently operated and less likely to collaborate with a university to train providers on EBPs. At the same time, most studies that support EBPs are not conducted in rural areas or on rural populations."

Recently, amazing solutions such as telehealth have helped increase access to mental health care for rural Americans, making treatment more obtainable. Along with these incredible technological advances, one thing we can all do to help improve access to mental health is simply talking about it. Talking about mental health can open up the door for people to feel more comfortable and less afraid to seek help.

*The American Psychiatric Association says*, "Research shows that knowing or having contact with someone with mental illness is one of the best ways to reduce stigma. Individuals speaking out and sharing their stories can have a positive impact. When we know someone with mental illness, it becomes less scary and more real and relatable."

To learn more about how you can become an advocate this Mental Health Awareness Month and join the National campaign," visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

**Senior Life Solutions** is Kearney County Health Services program, designed to meet the unique needs of individuals typically 65 and older experiencing depression or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging. If you or someone you know is struggling with a recent heart-related diagnosis or a decline in emotional health, our program wants you to know we are here to help. Whether through our program, or another service, our team works to identify and address the emotional needs of those in our community and provide support. Confidentially contact us at 308-832-3400 Option 4 for more information.