

Letter to the Editor: A major step forward in improving mental health care access



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As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I found Crain's article ["The youth mental health crisis needs urgent care. What will it take?"](#) (Oct. 23) compelling and timely. I agree that in order for kids to receive the mental health care they need, we, as adults, must do better at collaboration and coordination across — and within — multiple sectors, including medicine and education.

In health care, better teamwork is needed among primary care and mental health providers to close the imaginary gap between physical health and mental health. Mental health is health. Pediatricians, family physicians and psychiatrists, as well as other providers, must work more closely than ever to provide seamless care to each and every child in need.

Just a few years ago, Illinois became the first state in the country to implement reimbursement, both private and public, for the Psychiatric Collaborative Care Model, or CoCM, as it is called. This new model of care improves access to behavioral health services at the primary care level. I'm proud to say the Chicagoland Children's Health Alliance is one local CoCM program that is seeing very worthwhile outcomes, as a result. (The alliance is a partnership between Advocate Children's Hospital, University of Chicago Medicine Comer Children's Hospital and Pediatrics at NorthShore—Edward-Elmhurst Health System.)

This new model of care provides pediatricians with intensive training in diagnosing and caring for common pediatric behavioral health concerns. They then collaborate with psychiatrists during treatment. For families, it is a game changer. Not only does it reduce long waits to see mental health providers, it ensures a child has early access to care in a familiar setting from their trusted pediatrician. Approximately 100 Chicago-area pediatricians have participated and they report significant improvement in behavioral health diagnostic and treatment confidence.

I encourage every health care provider in the state to consider implementing CoCM. It's a major step forward in improving access to mental health care in Illinois.

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