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Ohio's ranking is depressing

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If you felt like pulling the covers over your head this morning, it might have something to do with where you live.

In its first ranking of states and the District of Columbia, from least depressed to most depressed, the advocacy group Mental Health America put Ohio near the bottom, at No. 43.

South Dakotans were happiest, Utah residents most depressed.

The rankings came from combining statistics from several national health databases. Factors included the percentage of adults and adolescents with major depression in the previous year, the percentage of adults experiencing serious psychological distress and the average number of days in the past month that residents reported poor mental health.

Ohio did better (No. 22) on the group's rankings based on suicide statistics. In 2004, the state had 1,319 suicide deaths. The lowest rate was in D.C.; the highest, Alaska.

Obstacles to care -- including a shortage of mental-health professionals and inadequate state funding -- contribute to the high toll of depression in lower-ranked states, the report suggests. And education level and personal wealth also played roles: States with a wealthier, more educated population base had lower depression rates.

Depression is one of the most burdensome diseases in America, and nowhere is it being identified and treated to the optimum degree, said David L. Shern, president and chief executive of Mental Health America.

"No state should be satisfied with the level of depression that they have," he said.

"I am very confident that we can drive these rates lower."

Amy Cooper, legislative liaison for the Ohio Department of Mental Health, said much of the data in the report is several years old and doesn't reflect some positive changes.

A recently enacted law makes insurers cover certain mental-health care in the same manner as other illnesses, and another initiative put \$2.5 million a year into mental-health efforts in child-care and preschool settings, she said.

Who's depressed

The advocacy group Mental Health America ranked the states and Washington, D.C., on depression. The top and bottom rated:

Least depressed

1. South Dakota
2. Hawaii
3. New Jersey
4. Iowa
5. Maryland
6. Minnesota
7. Louisiana
8. Illinois
9. North Dakota
10. Texas

Most depressed

42. Wyoming
43. Ohio
44. Missouri
45. Idaho
46. Oklahoma
47. Nevada
48. Rhode Island
49. Kentucky
50. West Virginia
51. Utah

Source: Mental Health America

Ohio's ranking is "right on the money," said Paul Granello, director of research for the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation.

At Ohio State University, where he works, depression is common, and getting people help can be difficult, particularly if they need to be hospitalized, he said. As for what might be setting Ohio apart, he pointed to the economy.

"You can't just keep closing factories and putting people out of work and expect it not to be a factor," Granello said.

Doctors are getting better at diagnosing depression, and some of the stigma around mental health has begun to disappear, but state dollars devoted to mental-health care have remained relatively stagnant, said Cheri Walter, chief executive officer of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities.

Another move that might improve care in Ohio would be a comprehensive mental-health parity law, said Laura Moskow Sigal, executive director of Mental Health America of Franklin County.

Ohio's existing law has exemptions and strict definitions of what qualifies as a mental illness.

"I got this (report) and I was extremely distressed," Moskow Sigal said.

To view the full report, go to www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/state-ranking.

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