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Another Voice

Within mental health, a new vision set: No one should suffer alone

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When it comes to our physical health, we do a pretty good job of addressing problems. But when it comes to how the health care system addresses mental health, there is tremendous room for improvement. Nearly one in five adults experience some form of mental health challenge each year. Yet more than half of them do not receive the behavioral health services they need. We can and *must* do better.

In order to make improvements, we need to provide more options for mental health screenings, solve longstanding shortages in the mental health workforce, and proactively address mental health concerns before they escalate into hospitalization, homelessness, incarceration or worse.

Health care advocates and policymakers are already making laudable headway. In California, the Each Mind Matters campaign is uniting people and organizations across the state to move mental health from a crisis-driven system to one rooted in wellness and prevention. And tax dollars from California's Proposition 63 are providing critical mental health treatment and support for thousands of adults



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and children, dramatically decreasing the amount of emergency interventions, hospitalizations and arrests that can stem from untreated conditions.

Efforts like this can be lifesaving in light of our current mode's shortcomings, including lack of access and the social prejudice around mental health challenges. In addition, for every \$1 invested in prevention and early intervention for mental health and addiction programs, we can save \$2 to \$10 in health care, criminal justice and productivity costs, according to an analysis by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

To continue this mental health paradigm shift, we are launching a new collaboration between Sutter Health and Mental Health America (MHA) to create and expand screening options and connect people with the services they need before they reach a crisis point. As an integrated health network that delivers mental health services across Northern California and Hawaii, and as a nonprofit that for more than a century has supported people with mental health challenges, our organizations know intimately what's needed to make our systems stronger.

One of our first joint initiatives is Screening to Supports (S2S), which will be available this fall. This online resource provides tailored mental health information, referrals to services, tools to monitor and maintain mental health, and online support from specialists and peer communities.

Through our collaboration, we are also providing opportunities for people to become certified peer counselors at Sutter Health and in other health networks. This initiative will expand the mental health workforce so that we can reach more patients, sooner, with the treatment and services they need.

Nearly all of us have seen the devastating impacts of mental health challenges. It's imperative that we work more aggressively to eliminate mental health prejudice and provide solutions that will protect and save lives before they spiral out of control.

We will know we've made progress when a visit to the doctor's office provides the same relief for mental health challenges that it would for a cut or a cough. To get there, we must work toward a new vision: that no one suffers alone.