

The Problem

The World Health Organization has identified major depressive disorders as the leading cause of disability in the United States for people ages 15 to 44.

In any given year, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reports, nearly 15 million Americans will suffer from major depression. Chronic mild depression affects an additional 3.3 million people 18 and older. Bipolar disorder, which includes mood swings from severe depression to mania, affects another 5.7 million Americans.

The Centers for Disease Control reports that in 2004, 32,439 people committed suicide in the United States. The highest suicide rates in the country are in Western states. Scholarly research cited by the NIMH shows that “more than 90 percent of people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental disorder, most commonly a depressive disorder or a substance abuse disorder.”

Mental Health America (formerly known as the National Mental Health Association) reports that Colorado has the country’s 8th highest suicide rate and the country’s 18th worst depression level.

A CBS News investigation in 2007 showed veterans of the Iraq War take their lives at twice the rate of Americans who didn’t serve.

The National Center for Biotechnology Information says that roughly half of all people with major depressive disorder will have recurrences and need long-term treatment. Meanwhile, “at least 20 percent of patients diagnosed with depression do not respond satisfactorily to several traditional antidepressant medication treatment trials.”

The U.S. Surgeon General’s Office has explained that “the willingness to pay for mental illness treatment services is considered to be ‘soft.’ The public generally ranks insurance coverage for mental disorders below that for somatic disorders.”

The RAND Corporation reports that “despite parity legislation (designed to provide equivalent health insurance benefits for mental illness and physical illness) insurance coverage remains problematic for persons at risk for mental disorders.”

The Surgeon General’s Office has also reported that one of the ways to attack the stigma of mental illness is by finding more effective treatments. This is precisely what the National Network of Depression Centers, including the one in Colorado, hope to do collaboratively.