

The banner features a dark grey background with a vertical blue stripe on the left side. The text 'ROAD MAP TO MENTAL HEALTH REFORM' is displayed in a sans-serif font, with 'ROAD MAP TO' in white and 'MENTAL HEALTH REFORM' in blue.

ROAD MAP TO MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

Writing a Letter to the Editor

Tips

- **Keep It Local** – Letters from community members are more likely to be published in local or regional publications than nationwide or major city publications.
- **Be Concise** – Increase your chance of getting published by keeping your message short and straightforward. Letters to the editor are not typically longer than 250 words.
- **Get to the Point** – Focus on the needs of mental health community and how the items in the Road Map help address them. Stick to actionable issues and concrete solutions.
- **Personal Touch** – Relate to readers and local leaders by sharing your connection to the community and commitment to mental health. For example:
 - I am a parent of a person living with serious mental illness and a longtime resident of (town); and ...
 - As a mental health professional who has served in the (region) area for X years ...
 - Our organization has advocated for mental health in (Illinois/region) since (year founded) and ...
- **Read Twice, Send Once** – Proofread your letter for typos and misspellings before sending!

Key Points for Letters to the Editor

We must finally treat mental illnesses, such as bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia, like we do all other medical conditions. The science is unequivocal – treatment works. Yet, Illinois has never made mental health treatment a priority, leading to:

- 20% of Illinois' correctional population has a mental health condition. Most are in for low-level crimes of survival (*e.g.*, trespassing to find a place to sleep)
- 57% of the most expensive Medicaid enrollees have a mental illness. They are expensive because they do not have access to treatment.
- 1/3 of the homeless population is homeless because of an untreated mental illness. *For no other disease would we accept these consequences.*

Mental health reform makes fiscal sense and treatment is the right way to go.

- Illinois must build treatment capacity in the mental health sector through Medicaid rate reform. Below-cost reimbursement prohibits the sector from growing, meaning continued spending of taxpayer dollars in all the wrong places, and wasting thousands of young lives.
- Early intervention is critical to slow the progression of these illnesses, prevent disability and the spiral into multiple hospitalizations, homelessness and justice system involvement.
- Invest in rental subsidies to enable affordable housing for those with serious mental illnesses who are homeless, as many other states have successfully done.
- Housing plus treatment (\$20,000/yr) is far more humane and cost effective than prison (\$37,000/yr) or multiple hospitalizations (\$6,000/hospitalization x many).

Illinois needs an action plan to address our mental health crisis. The time for reform is now.