

substance-related and addictive disorders and neurocognitive disorders grew in 2023, while increases in all other disorders shrank.

Integrated care

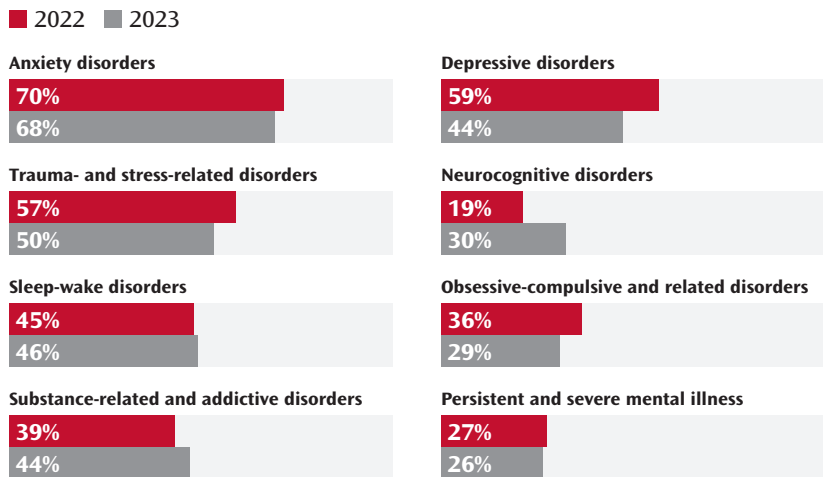
Psychologists are involved in treating mental and physical health conditions, potentially as members of care teams the survey noted. Alongside mental health concerns, psychologists reported treating patients with chronic pain (50%), obesity or weight conditions (42%), some symptoms of cancer (27%), and high blood pressure (25%).

Similarly, psychologists reported seeing more patients with disabilities; 47% of psychologists reported seeing increases in patients living with long COVID, 29% saw increases in patients living with chronic illness, and 27% saw increases in patients living with chronic pain.

Wright indicated that psychologists are increasing their services in integrated care. “Psychologists are working in primary care, specialty care and with cancer patients,” she said. “We will see continued movement in this direction.” APA is training psychologists in a holistic way about how physical health is related to mental health, Wright indicated.

Wright noted that important questions include how will the APA support its existing workforce, pave the way for future workers and continue to grow. “No matter how many

Percentage of psychologists reporting increases in patients presenting with mental health conditions in the last 12 months, 2022–2023*



* Psychologists who did not answer the question or responded “Not sure/I don’t treat patients in this population group” were excluded from this analysis.

Source: Practitioner Pulse Survey © 2023 American Psychological Association

psychologists we train there will never be [a workforce] large enough to meet the mental health demands of this country,” she said.

What are solutions? There needs to be more of a focus on prevention, said Wright. “How can we reach people before they actually need a psychologist or [offer] other types of support?” she noted. Peer support within the community can be a way to meet people where they are at, she suggested.

“The bottom line is we need to

think more creatively and innovatively about how we treat mental illness,” said Wright.

Wright added, “We cannot address the mental health crisis in this country by maintain the status quo of relying on weekly 45-minute face-to-face psychotherapy session for everyone who needs treatment,” “We must address and look at other ways to address this problem.” •

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Colorado merger recognizes community, service access needs

Aiming to meet the needs of communities facing challenges related to poor mental health, service access and increasing suicide rates among young people — and with an opioid and fentanyl epidemic — two Colorado-based organizations have announced a partnership that will create the largest, most innovative behavioral health provider in the state, leaders announced.

Leaders of Jefferson Center in Wheat Bridge and the Denver-based

Bottom Line...

The newly merged organization intends to have joint staff involved in executing the shared vision. Leaders announced plans to retain all staff and programs.

WellPower — each organization locally and nationally recognized community mental health centers — said the demand for behavioral health services is greater than ever

before. The new non-profit organization will officially launch on July 1, 2024, and will serve the communities of Clear Creek, Denver, Gilpin and Jefferson County.

“We want to be able to meet the needs of our community and meet those needs more effectively,” Carl Clark, M.D., president and CEO of WellPower, told *MHW*. “As community mental health centers, both Jefferson Center and WellPower

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have decades-long histories of providing comprehensive care at varying levels of acuity for people in the communities they serve, from mental health treatment to housing to social determinants of health.”

Clark added, “This merger will strengthen the combined organization’s ability to continue offering this wide range of supports while responding more effectively to particular areas of need, such as substance use treatment and housing services.”

Retaining the brand

The merged organization will retain the WellPower name. Nearly a year and a half ago, the former Mental Health Center of Denver incorporated wellness into its brand by changing the organization’s name to

Both organizations have long histories of servicing their communities deeply and intentionally, each expert in providing solutions that make a difference in the lives of the people they serve.”

The two organizations will serve a combined total of 50,000 individuals in the various counties. “We’re excited about expanding our capacity,” noted Kuenzler. “Joining the two organizations builds on the strengths and shared values of each — including a deep commitment to diversity, equity, inclusiveness and belonging — helps fill gaps in specialized care, expands [our] workforce and programming and creates opportunities with technology and other innovations. This merger will identify the best of both organizations and bring them forward into the merged entity.”

continued focus will be on social determinants and helping people go back to school and live in safe, affordable housing.

Clark noted that both organizations have similar support staff, and both have a lot to offer. Both staff have IT teams. Support, however, is limited by the bandwidth. “With the two organizations [merging] we’ll double our bandwidth instantly,” he said.

Meanwhile, there are no planned layoffs. “The current environment demand is much greater than we can provide,” said Clark. The new organization’s focus on housing provides an example of where some more positions can be added, he noted.

In a news release, the leaders stated that they envision some staff may transition into new roles and they intend to create more career pathways and opportunities for growth.

“Both organizations have long histories of servicing their communities deeply and intentionally, each expert in providing solutions that make a difference in the lives of the people they serve.”

Kiara Kuenzler, PsyD, LP

Reducing gaps

Supported by technology and flexible treatment models, the merged organization will be able to utilize existing staff more efficiently and effectively to reduce gaps in care, Kuenzler said.

In a video message from Clark and Kuenzler to announce the merger, Clark explained that, for business reasons, the organizations are going to fold the assets of WellPoint into the legal entity of Jefferson Center. “We designed our services to make coming together with services easier to do,” said Clark.

Under the merger, Kuenzler will serve as the president and Clark will be the CEO until his retirement. At that time, Kuenzler will assume the expanded role of president and CEO. •

WellPower (see “Denver center name change reflects MH, well-being connection,” *MHW*, May 30, 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1002/mhw.33239>).

“We’re excited about maintaining the WellPower brand,” Kiara Kuenzler, Psy.D., LP, president and CEO of Jefferson Center, told *MHW*, adding that retention will go well with the Jefferson Center’s corporate structure.

The merger, added Kuenzler, is unlike a typical acquisition. “This is truly a merger of equals, not an acquisition of one organization by the other. Jefferson Center and WellPower are both financially strong organizations, with adequate reserves, operating revenue and assets to strengthen a combined organization.

Comprehensive care

The primary focus of this merger is ensuring that more people in Colorado can access the high quality, comprehensive care they need without barriers, Kuenzler explained. “The demand for behavioral health services is greater than ever, and the behavioral health system in Colorado is undergoing significant change,” she said. “This merger will allow the combined organization to bring specialized care and unique programming to more people in Denver, Jefferson, Clear Creek and Gilpin counties.”

The new organization will focus on ensuring that patients exercise, eat healthfully, and get enough sleep, noted Clark. Additionally, the

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