

## Myrt Armstrong - Mental Health Issues

Bismarck Tribune; April 18, 2015

In my over 30 years of Mental Health advocacy as executive director of the Mental Health Association in North Dakota, I've never witnessed such inattention to something so obvious.

The North Dakota Legislature has turned its back to gaps in services that are staring us in the face. If legislators aren't sure what to do — other than cut services more — they can look at the 2014 Schulte report, listen to overworked staff, desperate consumers and families and frustrated police officials forced to use jails as hospitals. There is a significant lack of hospital beds to treat those in a mental health or substance abuse crisis, forcing people to travel hundreds of miles for even basic intervention. In some cases, instead of receiving immediate services, they are placed on lengthy waiting lists.

Even a modest amount of money for suicide prevention was stripped out, leaving people in need of critical care with nowhere to turn — all the while North Dakota has one of the highest suicide rates in America.

Consumers of services came forward to testify about modest funding for peer support to help them help themselves. Even that fell on deaf ears. A statewide stakeholder group was convened to also present recommendations for mental health and substance abuse treatment, few of which will see any substantial funding support.

Don't even get me started on the cuts to child protection services, sexual assault help and women's services!

If legislators are unwilling to invest the funding recommended by their own consultant just last year, the state of North Dakota should prepare to fund unlimited dollars to the State Hospital because it will be the only place for people to go. What a sad day. Will it really take a lawsuit, as has been hinted at for many years, to wake us up?