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### *Mental Health Mayhem*

My name is David Pinno and I live with a disability and a mental health challenge. Many people overlook the reality that many people with disabilities also often suffer from a Mental Illness. This is known to be dual diagnosis. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) over 30% of people with disabilities experience frequent mental distress which is almost five times more than those without disabilities.

It is next to impossible to find a provider who will take my insurance, has training dealing with trauma, or really takes the time to get to know their client. I have found that Therapists in some cases have a lack of empathy or compassion.

Recently the Wisconsin Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities – Mental Health (IDD-MH) System Improvement was initiated by the Department of Health Services (DHS) and is in the starting phase of helping create systems change around mental health and IDD.

My first bit of advice for DHS would be to have more funding go into real support for people living with disabilities and mental illness, which would help everyone with mental health struggles also. This could be achieved by closing north center and south center mental health institutions and to start embracing supported community living.

Mental Health facilities such as north center and south center do not help move people out in the community. These facilities are also costly to manage/upkeep and house people for periods of time. Increasing the number of mental health professionals and improving the pay of

professionals in this field would incentivize more providers to join the field and work with larger portions of the population.

We also need to expand the training and education of providers and to expand on peer support and peer run respites. We know that people are healthier and safer when they are connected to their community. Having more regional support groups and community support would also help people get more connected and expand their support network.

I feel people with disabilities often cannot find many mental health professionals because of the reimbursement rate by Medicaid/Medicare and those who are trained to work with people with a dual diagnosis.

While there are many things needed to expand mental health services and access for people, there are some supports available. If you are struggling with your mental health, reach out to your local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter or call your county's Aging and Disability Resource Center to find other mental health supports. If you need to talk to someone about your mental health, you can always call or text 988 to get connected to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.