

## **Resilience on full display with recent health care announcements**

### **OUR VIEW**

One of the biggest concerns when HSHS announced it would close hospitals in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls, with Prevea clinics following them out the door later in the spring, was the effect the departures would have on mental health care.

Services for those having a mental health crisis are better than in decades past, due in large part to the diminishing, unwarranted stigma surrounding mental health issues. But they're still underserved compared to other basic needs.

Wisconsin's passage of Act 249 will most definitely help.

It's not going to cover all of northwestern Wisconsin's needs, but it will offer options for management of crisis situations.

We're usually cautious about using press releases as references in our editorials. They can be informative, but they're never issued out of altruistic instincts. They're trying to convey a specific point of view, to sway people.

In this case, though, the release sent by Rep. Clint Moses has a passage that's as good a short summary of the act as we've seen: "Act 249 creates Crisis Urgent Care and Observation Centers designed to provide immediate service to those experiencing mental health and substance abuse crises that may make them a harm to themselves or others. The first of these such facilities will be located in Western Wisconsin, an area where HSHS recently closed hospitals. The current closest facility is located in Oshkosh."

It's important to note these new facilities aren't finished products. Wisconsin's Department of Health Services will still have to establish regulations and certify any new facilities, and there's groundwork to be laid with local governments as well.

Still, this represents progress, as well as an unusually swift and unified response by Wisconsin's elected officials. This act moved through the Legislature with little opposition.

The governor signed it into law without changes. And, as we noted in an editorial last week, there's lots of credit for all involved.

Northwestern Wisconsin did not ask to be in the current situation. The loss of Eau Claire's oldest hospital, a critical facility in Chippewa Falls that was far more than just a

hospital, and the pending closure of clinics that are functionally closer to small-town hospitals than what people think of when they hear the word clinic is a heavy blow. There have been comparisons to the closure of Uniroyal in Eau Claire decades ago, and we don't think those comparisons are far off the mark.

The difference, though, is that the region has rallied. There have been clear, effective efforts at building multi-community coalitions to address the challenge. We have to think those endeavors helped spur the political response at the state level. It's far easier to come to the aid of a group that's actively fighting back against misfortune. The saying may be that God helps those who help themselves, but let's not pretend that isn't also a very common human response.

The results, Act 249 included, have been impressive. We won't pretend these changes are anything but devastating, but look at what has happened in response. Multiple companies have announced plans to expand. Last week saw Oak-Leaf announce it would open four clinics in the region — sites previously run by Prevea and largely staffed by the same people.

We're a long way from being out of the woods. The coming months, perhaps years, won't be all sunshine and flowers. We will have setbacks as a region.

That said, not even the most optimistic assessments at the time of the HSHS/Prevea announcement would have envisioned what has been accomplished. It speaks to an impressive level of resilience, and that's worth noting with pride.

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