

Biden administration seeks to expand 24/7 mental health care

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Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra speaks during a news conference announcing investments in the nation's behavioral health infrastructure, at the HHS Humphrey Building, Tuesday, Oct. 18, 2022, in Washington. Credit: AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

The government announced plans Tuesday to award millions of dollars in

grants to expand all-hours mental health and substance abuse care in more communities around the country.

"Today we're talking about providing to Americans 24/7 support for crisis care," Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said.

"That's something that's only been available to some, in some places. But depending on your income and ZIP code, you could be totally out of luck. That's going to start to change."

There are more than 400 community behavior health clinics across 46 states that provide 24-hour care for any child or adult who walks through the door, even if they can't afford to pay. The effort began in 2014, born from bipartisan legislation years in the making from Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan and Republican Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri.

The clinics, often run at the local level or by nonprofits, have struggled with spotty funding from the [federal government](#), making it difficult to retain staff and pay for services. The gun violence bill that President Joe Biden signed into law after shooting rampages at a school in Uvalde, Texas, and a grocery in Buffalo, New York, bolstered [federal funding](#) to the states for the program.

In addition, Biden's COVID-19 relief plans have set aside more than \$1.2 billion for the centers. The clinics also serve those with private insurance and offer a sliding pay scale for those who are uninsured.



Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, left, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., and Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, & Related Agencies (Labor/HHS), arrive for a news conference to announce investments in the nation's behavioral health infrastructure, during a news conference at the HHS Humphrey Building, Tuesday, Oct. 18, 2022, in Washington. Credit: AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

Now the federal government is asking states to scale up their efforts around the clinics, offering \$1 million grants starting next year for up to 15 states to map out an expansion of the centers. Ten of those states will then be selected in 2024 for more money for their programs through Medicaid by securing federal matching funds at an enhanced rate. The goal is for 10 states to join the program every other year until all 50 are

folded in.

Nine states are already getting higher reimbursement rates from Medicaid for patients who seek help from community centers. In the other [states](#), centers can receive money directly from the federal government—\$300 million worth of grants were awarded in September.

Children as young as 4 years old have sought help at the Arundel Lodge in Edgewater, Maryland, since it launched an urgent care center for mental health and substance abuse in December with the help of [a \\$2 million federal grant](#). Area teachers and school counselors have called to get help for their students.

Doctors send patients who need immediate help to the clinic, to avoid long wait times at expensive, private rehabilitation centers. And police officers now take some people who are in crisis to the lodge, rather than jail cell or a hospital.

The lodge's urgent care is staffed with nurses, mental health specialists and peer counselors who help walk-ins develop plans for treatment, said executive director Mike Drummond.

"On a walk-in basis, we can evaluate them, assess them, develop a plan of treatment, initiate treatment," Drummond said.

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