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HELP

FROM A1

Denihan advocates adequate funding

"If we just talked about it more, maybe there would be less untreated mental illness."

William Denihan, the CEO of the Mental Health Services Board, along with Latisha James, senior director of local government and community relations at Case Western Reserve Univer-

sity, organized the event to bring attention to the amount of money available for mental health services in Cuyahoga County.

"Treatment works," Denihan told the group.

"People recover.

"It happens every single day.

"That's what keeps me going."

But they can't recover, he said, without adequate funding.

Which brought Denihan to his main point: that the Ohio Department of Mental Health does not provide Cuyahoga County with its fair share of money for

community mental health programs.

Denihan points to the 20 cents per resident Cuyahoga County receives for community mental health services. No other county in the state gets less, he says. In fact, Ashland County, which has far fewer people than Cuyahoga, receives more than any other county: \$20.30 for every resident.

But state officials say Denihan is looking at just two categories of mental health funding, not all seven.

When all seven are taken into account, they say, Cuyahoga receives 15.4 percent of the state's mental health funding and it has only 11 percent of the state's population.

During Wednesday's hearing, Denihan said he wants to see the categories of community mental health funding he was speaking of distributed more equitably.

He said Cuyahoga needs more local money, too.

"We also have to look at ourselves locally," Denihan said, "and see if we're providing adequate funding."

Cuyahoga County, through its health and human-services levy, contributes \$28.08 per resident for mental health services.

That's the lowest of the state's other large, urban counties, he said. Summit County spends the most, \$70.04 per resident.

That's one reason Denihan wants to see a new levy on the ballot, one that funds just mental health and addiction services in Cuyahoga County.

"I would like to see one as soon as possible," Denihan said after the two-hour meeting.

The more people who tell their stories of overcoming illness, the more the stigma will fade and the more help will become available, he said.

"We need to capitalize on the power of treatment."

He had support from a number of community leaders Wednesday.

Besides Cimperman, Cleveland City Council members Jeffrey Johnson, Kevin Kelley and Matt Zone were there, as were Cuyahoga County Council members Yvonne Conwell and Dale Miller.

Advocates seek more money for treating mental illness

Councilman relates family's story to aid effort

DIANE SUCHETKA
Plain Dealer Reporter

On Wednesday morning, Cleveland City Councilman Joe Cimperman stood before a group of 30 people and told the story of finding his mother naked in the basement doing laundry at 2 a.m., his father beside her pleading for her to come back to bed.

He told of how his mother, who appeared on the front lawn with no top on, punched a police officer squarely in the jaw.

He told of his mother's 22 hospitalizations in 12 years beginning when he was 10 years old, her electroshock therapy, the drugs she took and the way they left her glassy-eyed and slurring her words.

His mother, he told the group, had bipolar disorder. And his family hid it for years.

Not anymore.

"I made up my mind as we closed the casket that I was never going to be silent," Cimperman said.

That was 15 years ago.

He's talked about it since, but Wednesday he told the story publicly for the first time.

His hope is that by talking about it, he can help bring people together to do something about a health problem that affects one in four Americans.

"Getting a collective community to take care of each other, it's not only the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do," Cimperman said Wednesday morning after a hearing on mental health at the offices of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.

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