

## McCoy: Improving access to quality health care services

state Sen. Matt McCoy 11:03 p.m. CST February 9, 2015



(Photo: Special to the Register)

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Becoming the healthiest state in the country isn't just about eating nutritious foods and making time for exercise. Iowans also deserve access to affordable health insurance and good health care providers — doctors, nurses and others — in our communities.

Unfortunately, Iowa lags behind much of the nation in health care workforce recruitment. In particular, Iowa struggles compared with the rest of the nation to attract mental health professionals. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Iowa is ranked

44th in the nation for mental health workforce availability. Of particular note, Iowa ranks 46th for the number of psychiatrists per capita and 47th for the number of psychologists per capita.

The Senate Human Resources Committee recently heard a presentation from the Iowa Department of Public Health to better understand existing health care workforce training and recruitment programs. NAMI and the IowaCare Givers also presented ideas on ways to improve current programs. Recommendations ranged from making programs at the Department of Public Health more efficient and effective to establishing more residency programs for doctors after they complete their medical training.

Iowa recently redesigned its local mental health and disability services system, and now we must take the necessary steps to train and attract high-quality health care providers who can offer services to Iowans in every corner of the state.

The governor's proposal to close the mental health institutes in Clarinda and Mount Pleasant makes the need even more urgent.

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