

July 12, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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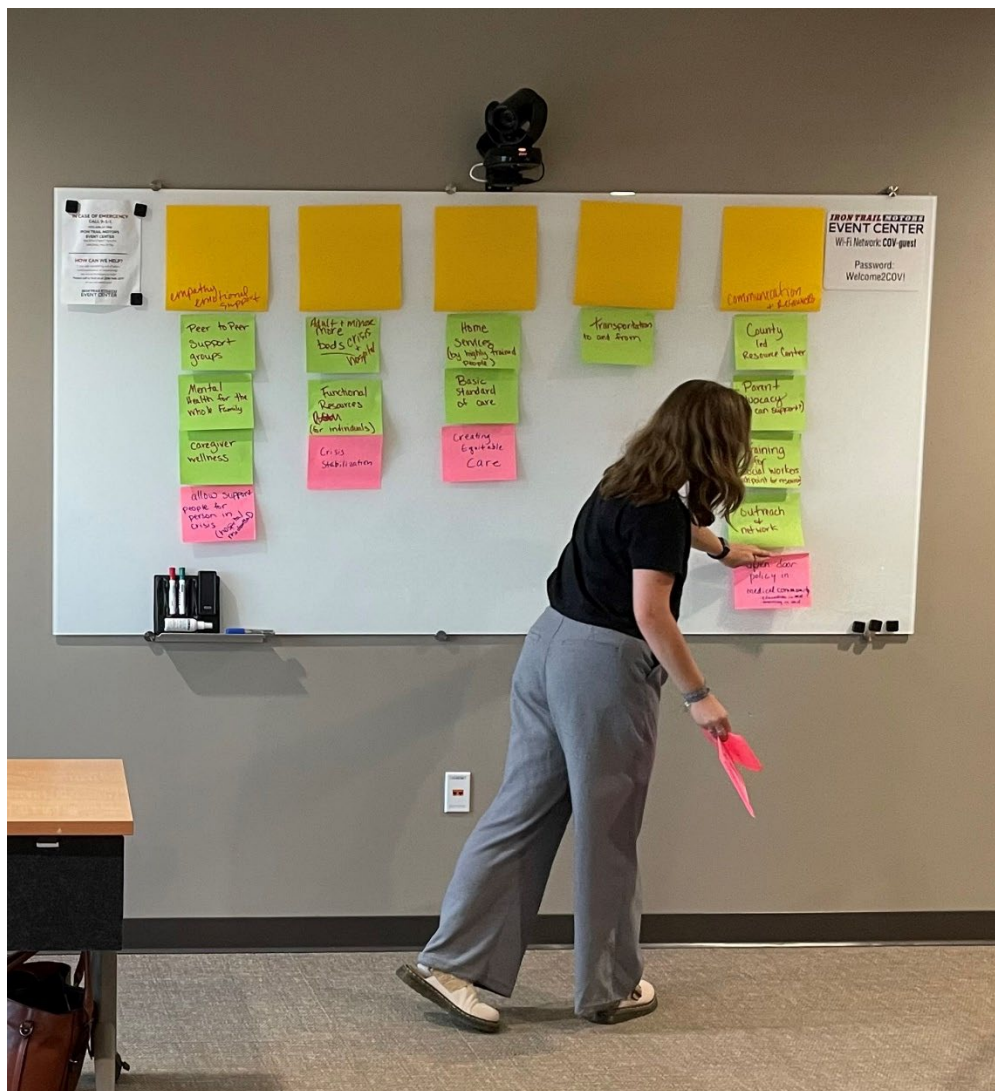
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<https://wildernesshealthmn.org/>



**WILDERNESS
HEALTH**

Partners advancing rural health



Caption: Daylen Kallberg, Student Intern with Wilderness Health, places notes with community ideas for improved behavioral healthcare in rural NE Minnesota.

Mental and Behavioral Healthcare Needs in Virginia

Wilderness Health Hosts Community Listening Sessions

Virginia, Minn. - Mental and behavioral health needs remain a challenge throughout the state of Minnesota, and the unique needs of rural Minnesotans require targeted attention. To learn more about the needs of residents of Northern St. Louis County, Wilderness Health invited community members to share their stories and help shape the future of mental health care. The listening session was held on Wednesday, July 10th at the Iron Trail Motors Event Center in Virginia, MN. This was the third event in a series being held across Northeastern Minnesota.

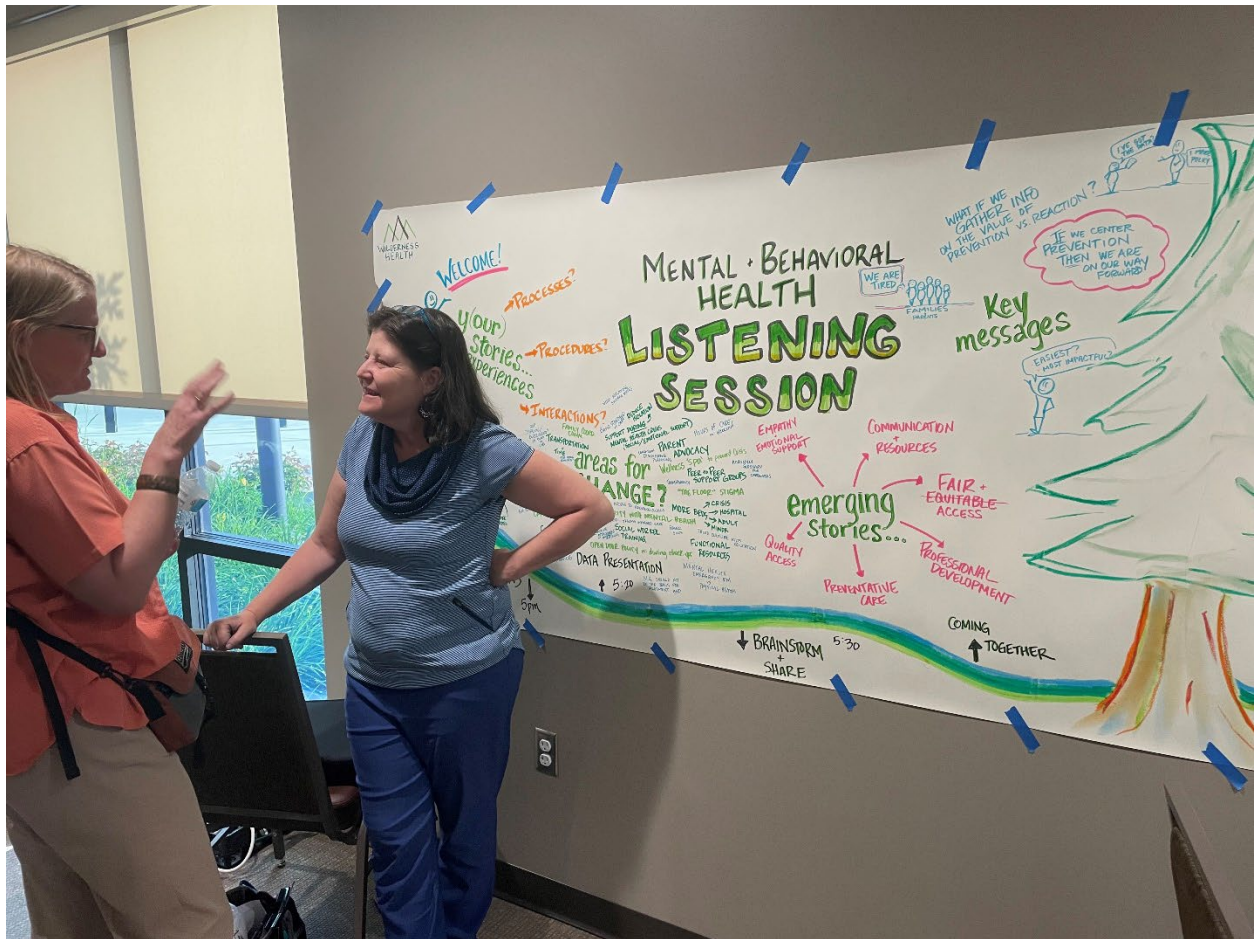
Attendees shared stories of the ongoing challenges of navigating mental and behavioral healthcare. The group expressed the need for more resources in the Iron Range – from psychiatrists, to mental health and occupational therapists, to comprehensive longer-term care options. One community member and caregiver commented that finding help is hard and that there is “no end in sight.” Another said that they are forced to choose between their own health, their child’s health, and their family’s health. Long waits in the ER before bed placement, difficulties in getting all social and medical providers on the same page, and challenges with transportation were other common themes.

The group recommended parent support and advocacy, trauma-informed care training for all, and inclusive family involvement in treatment. Other suggestions centered around fair access to healthcare resources especially in rural areas.

According to Zomi Bloom, Telehealth Program Manager for Wilderness Health and program manager of the new project around mental and behavioral health care coordination, “Through the stories and recommendations of brave community members navigating mental and behavioral healthcare, we will identify gaps and find ways to work with our networks to move forward. We are grateful for the attendees’ active participation in helping figure out how to solve challenging – and urgent – problems. I truly feel that when people come together around tough issues, there is hope.”

For Virginia and surrounding area residents who missed the listening session, Wilderness is collecting feedback directly. Please email your thoughts to info@wildernesshealthmn.org or call Zomi Bloom at 218-834-7323.

The event was supplemented by local Graphic Recorder Nelle Rhicard, who will compile feedback across the region into pictures that tell the story of community needs and hopes. The listening sessions was facilitated in partnership with Northspan Group, Inc.



Caption: Nelle Rhicard, graphic recorder, chats with a participant about key messages from the listening session.

Impact of the Listening Sessions on the Future of Care

Through funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Rural Health Network Development Program, Wilderness Health and rural Northeastern Minnesota communities will identify successes, barriers, and possible solutions. For questions about the regional listening sessions please reach out to Zomi Bloom at 218-834-7323 or zomi.bloom@wildernesshealthmn.org.

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About Wilderness Health- a non-profit collaborative of independent providers working together to improve rural health care in Northeastern Minnesota and Wisconsin. Headquartered in Two Harbors since 2013, Wilderness Health aims to create a unified and supportive network for its members through its core values of collaboration, independence, networking, and quality. For more information about Wilderness, visit <https://wildernesshealthmn.org/>.

Wilderness Health Members:

Bigfork Valley Hospital
Community Memorial Hospital
Cook Hospital
Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital
Fairview Range / Range Regional Health Services
Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital
Aspirus Lake View
North Shore Health
Aspirus St. Luke's