

Hermiston's new psychiatric care facility 'a huge step in the right direction'

By MICHAEL KANE Northeast Oregon Now Mar 18, 2024 Updated Mar 19, 2024 0



From left, Community Counseling Solutions Board Chair Mark Lemmon, Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer, REACH Executive Director Kimberly Lindsay, Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann and state Rep. Greg Smith are all smiles March 14, 2024, after cutting the ribbon at the ceremony for the new Rivers Edge Acute Center for Healing in Hermiston.

HERMISTON — Mental health advocates, elected officials and community members turned out en masse Thursday, March 14, for the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Rivers Edge Acute Center for Healing — or REACH — in Hermiston.

Approximately 100 people gathered at the facility on west Linda Avenue for the event highlighted by remarks from state Rep. Greg Smith, Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer, Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann, Community Counseling Solutions Board Chair Mark Lemmon and REACH Executive Director Kimberly Lindsay.

"I know the issue we have here with acute care in Umatilla County," said Shafer, who also serves on the CCS board. "This is very much needed in our region and a huge step in the right direction."

REACH is in the former Aspen Springs facility. It is a licensed 15-bed facility — nine beds for individuals experiencing acute psychiatric distress and six for those in need of longer-term psychiatric residential care.

Lifeways Inc., the former Umatilla County mental health provider, opened Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in September 2020. It closed its doors less than seven months later, citing difficulties in staffing the facility.

"That left a void in acute care in this region," said Smith, who was instrumental in getting state funding to purchase the facility.

That void meant individuals needing acute psychiatric care would have to travel great distances to get appropriate care, said Smith.

Drotzmann spoke about the trickle-down effect of not having a facility in the region such as REACH for people with acute mental health problems.

"One day last week there were seven people in emergency rooms in Umatilla County in need of beds," Drotzmann said. "We are providing a facility desperately needed in Eastern Oregon and across the state that will address the challenges we are facing in our hospital emergency room where folks are often being housed for days because we can't find them beds. That's not good for the hospital, their staff or, worse yet, the patient."

Lindsay agreed.

"This facility will be so impactful," she said. "I promise you it will mean less people in the emergency room."

Drotzmann, who also is a candidate for the state Senate District 29 seat, said mental health has "taken a back seat for decades and we now find ourselves in urgent need to rebuild those resources — the physical facilities like this one and the workforce, the wonderful people of character that believe we are only as strong as our weakest members."

Lindsay said once the facility officially opens in mid-April it will provide daily therapeutic services, including medication stabilization, counseling, skills training and care coordination. Funding for services will primarily come from an individual's insurance provider.

The facility has a 20-member staff, including psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners, a full complement of nursing staff, residential associates, cooks, maintenance and supervisory staff.