



Behavioral health urgent care center planned for Ogdensburg

By TOM GRASER
Feb 17, 2021

OGDENSBURG — Citizen Advocates is working on a plan to place a Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center in the city.

The St. Lawrence County Community Services Board recently approved the proposal.

“We call it a crisis and recovery center,” said Joseph Riccio, Citizen Advocates director of communications and government affairs. “In the public’s mind, when you say urgent care, they immediately orient to, ‘I’ve got a sore throat or my kid scraped his knee and I have to go to the urgent care center,’ This is urgent care for mental health and addiction treatment.”

“Many communities already have 24/7 urgent care centers for physical health, but less common are those that provide urgent care for mental health or addiction treatment,” James Button, chief executive officer of Citizen Advocates, said in a prepared statement.

Citizen Advocates operates a similar facility in Malone, Mr. Riccio said.

“We found a lot of people were going to the ER and emergency room staff are skilled in a lot of things but they do not necessarily have the resources they need to treat someone who is in crisis for mental health or addiction,” Mr. Riccio said.

The Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center will not only provide the mental health or addiction support needed immediately, but will also help people get connected to services to provide support once the crisis has passed, such as counseling appointments and housing and transportation services.

Citizen Advocates will employ between 20 and 25 people to staff the center.

The treatment team will include a supervising physician, advance practice providers, registered nurses, therapists, targeted case managers, peer specialists and customer support.

Targeted case managers connect clients with services like job training or housing, often coordinated through other organizations. Peer specialists are specially trained counselors who often have lived experience with a mental health or addiction diagnosis, or both.

“It’s also important to note this is all available on an outpatient basis in a completely voluntary setting,” Dr. Joshua Frank, chief medical officer for Citizen Advocates, said in a prepared statement. “Our main focus is to provide prompt, effective, recovery-focused services in a respectful, patient-centered environment.”

A location for the center has not been determined, Mr. Riccio said, it is tentatively planned to be opened by the end of this year.