

## Can better health care help fight crime?



1 HOUR AGO • [KURT HANSON DAILY HERALD](#)

**PROVO** — Police and law enforcement officials are constantly looking at statistics to analyze how they can lower crime in their cities and better protect their communities.

According to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, affordable and available health care may be one solution to reducing crime in the community.

Provo Police Chief John King, along with Dr. Juergen Korbanka with Wasatch Mental Health,

held a press conference Tuesday morning at the Provo Police Department to call on state lawmakers to accept federal funding that will extend health insurance to those in need.

Brett Beckerson with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids said the organization primarily focuses on helping children early in life to prevent crime later.

“Our involvement in this instance isn’t necessarily to fight crimes invested in kids, but to fight crime invested in families,” Beckerson said.

King said mental health and criminality are not the same. However, he stressed that assisting those who have a low quality of life can help lessen the risk of criminal behaviors.

“I’m not here as an expert, but I do know about crime prevention, which is why I’m urging our legislators to ensure that treatment for mental and behavioral health is available for our at-risk children and adults,” he said.

In a presentation titled “Our Officers Make That Knock on the Door”, King outlined three results stemming from expanded coverage of health care in Utah:

1. Fewer deaths from external causes: Proper interactions between at-risk individuals and medical treatment can reduce DUI fatalities, drug overdoses, suicides and murders
2. More children and teens screened and treated for health issues: With expansion, at least 6,000 children in Utah will be more likely to be enrolled in health insurance and can receive screening and treatment for issues that can lead to criminal behavior
3. Less child abuse and neglect: Statistics show abuse and neglect double the odds a child will commit a crime by age 19 when compared to youth from similar backgrounds who have not suffered abuse or neglect. Nearly two-thirds of all child-abuse cases involve parents who abuse drugs or alcohol

According to statistics from the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, 75,114 Utahns are in need of, but are not receiving, mental health treatment services, while 120,724 Utahns are not receiving needed substance-use disorder services.

Korbanka said of those hundreds of thousands of Utahns who need substance abuse and

mental health treatment, those who've committed criminal acts may not be receiving services they need to avoid relapsing and returning to illegal behaviors.

"One of the challenges that we still have ... is once individuals are identified and they may have acted criminally, they need to have a place to go to be treated to avoid recidivism," Korbanka said. "And that's where comprehensive coverage of behavioral and mental health care comes in."

Beckerson said expanding health care coverage to include mental health treatment has proven results across the country, and he hopes those results can be seen in Utah as well.

Gov. Gary Herbert had a plan to expand health care within Utah, though it was shot down in the State House of Representatives. Beckerson said he and the organization stand by the governor in crafting a plan that will include services needed for at-risk individuals.

"What we're seeing is that the biggest return on investment for states who choose to do that is with mental and behavioral health," he said. "States are having a huge cross savings across the country when they expand health care coverage for those issues that law enforcement now don't have to deal with."