Earlier this year, The New York Times asked readers to name the most neglected stories that deserve coverage in 2014, and the first choice was loud and clear: the crisis in the country’s mental health. About a quarter of adults experience mental illness in any given year, along with millions of children. About 1 in 17 Americans deal with severely debilitating mental illness, and they’re the people least likely to have access to critically needed care.

While Minnesota is one of the healthiest states in the nation on almost all counts, our mental health is hurting. The rate of suicide in our state is on the rise, indicating that many people aren’t getting the help they need.

But contrary to popular perception, most mental illness is highly treatable and can be managed well with the right support. The real crisis is not that there is mental illness in our midst — it’s the lack of access to quality care and the stigma that prevents people from seeking help.

Local nonprofits are working to change that. Minnesota Philanthropy Partners teamed with philanthropic-research company Philanthropedia to find out which nonprofits are having the greatest impact on mental health care in our state. (For more information, visit myphilanthropedia.org.) These organizations rely heavily on individual giving and volunteer time. Your support truly can save lives.
If You Want to Support ... At-Risk Children
Consider: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

Children and teens are a vulnerable population when it comes to mental health, but with quality care they also have great hope for improvement. Wilder’s nationally recognized work taps into that potential for healing by treating the combination of physiological, social and familial factors at work in mental health disorders in the young. Wilder provides services to youth in its Saint Paul clinic, local schools and families’ homes, offering assessment, case management, day treatment programs and much more. Children who need help range from toddlers in the early childhood program to high-risk adolescents referred through juvenile corrections. Wilder works closely with the families of those high-risk youth to create home settings where the children’s behaviors can be addressed, and it helps children at risk of out-of-home placement heal with their families. The work Wilder does with this difficult-to-treat but socially vital population, getting children back on track to healthy adulthood, is critical to the community’s future.

How You Can Help: Volunteer as a resource attendant at Wilder’s Child Guidance Clinic or offer administrative or outreach support.

If You Want to Support ... Culturally Sensitive Care
Consider: Community-University Health Care Center

In culturally diverse communities, especially those whose members are new to the U.S., barriers to mental health care can be particularly prohibitive. CUHCC helps address that by providing low-cost, culturally informed care to a wide range of individuals. It was founded in 1966 to serve low-income families in Minneapolis’ Phillips neighborhood, and today more than 75 percent of its clientele are people of color. The center reflects the area’s diversity, with a staff that’s about 50 percent people of color, immigrants and refugees. The clinic’s track record is particularly impressive: About 93 percent of those who receive psychiatric treatment show marked improvement in functioning at school, home and work. The vast majority are able to avoid psychiatric hospitalization and maintain stable living situations in the community. These success rates speak to the effectiveness of treating individuals within their social support networks, as well as the practical necessity of greater health equity in the Twin Cities.

How You Can Help: Spread awareness about culturally informed mental health care by bringing a speaker from CUHCC to your business or faith community.