ILLINOIS: Why the U.S. mental health care system needs more places for people to just chill out

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What if, rather than heading to a hospital emergency room for help with a mental health crisis, people could check in to a living room instead? “Living Rooms” are what Illinois calls its five state-funded behavioral health crisis centers. These facilities provide an alternative to emergency department care, which both patients and mental health experts agree is not well-designed for individuals in mental distress. The Living Rooms are staffed by doctors, psychiatric nurses, and peer counselors, and the environment is designed to be welcoming and non-clinical. “Guests” are greeted warmly, and staff members focus on making them feel supported and in control. In addition to immediate care, the Living Room program also helps with accessing resources for longer-term recovery. Mental health urgent care centers have opened in other parts of the country as well, each attempting to help people in mental health crisis more successfully and economically than is often possible in hospital settings.

Spark Extra! Learn more about the growing range of options for urgent mental health care in SPRC Spotlight: Crisis Services for Suicide Prevention [2].

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