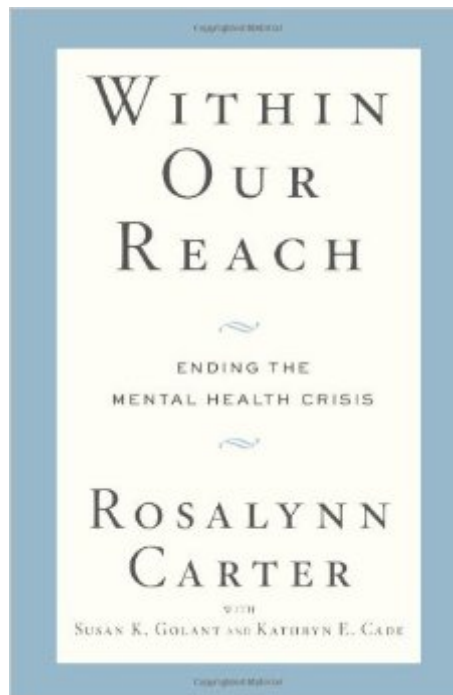


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# Within Our Reach: Ending The Mental Health Crisis



## Synopsis

In *Within Our Reach: Ending the Mental Health Crisis*, Rosalynn Carter and coauthors Susan K. Golant and Kathryn E. Cade render an insightful, unsparing assessment of the state of mental health. Mrs. Carter has been deeply invested in this issue since her husband's gubernatorial campaign when she saw firsthand the horrific, dehumanizing treatment of people with mental illnesses. Using stories from her 35 years of advocacy to springboard into a discussion of the larger issues at hand, Carter crafts an intimate and powerful account of a subject previously shrouded in stigma and shadow, surveying the dimensions of an issue that has affected us all. She describes a system that continues to fail those in need, even though recent scientific breakthroughs with mental illness have potential to help most people lead more normal lives. *Within Our Reach* is a seminal, searing, and ultimately optimistic look at how far we've come since Carter's days on the campaign trail and how far we have yet to go.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality." Virginia Woolf  
In *Within Our Reach: Ending the Mental Health Crisis*, Rosalynn Carter's brief (156 pgs), well-researched (179 endnotes), interesting and readable book, the former first lady lays waste to many of the ghosts that haunt the field of mental health. Mrs. Carter is no newcomer to the field, first becoming interested in the mental health issues while helping Jimmy Carter campaign for governor of Georgia in 1966. Under Jimmy Carter, the most significant mental health bill in modern times was passed in 1980, only to be defunded one

month after Reagan was inaugurated. Within Our Reach largely sticks to the facts, and is not a partisan polemic. One in four Americans suffer from mental health related symptoms. Mental health is the largest single cause of disability and loss of productivity in the work place. Yet the treatment for mental health related problems is plagued by lack of access, a diminishing work force of qualified mental health professionals, little to no coverage of costs for those without insurance, and very spotty coverage for those that do. In primary care (I'm a family practitioner) it is estimated that 40% of office visits are related directly or indirectly to mental health issues. Within Our Reach is true to its introduction, which is titled "A Call to Action". In an easy to follow and logical sequence, Mrs. Carter lays out the phantoms that have inhibited reaching workable solutions to mental health illnesses in the U.S., and then provides the means to exorcise these demons. What are some of these specters? One is the stigma of mental illness, exacerbated by the frequent portrayal in the media of the mentally ill as being frightening and prone to violence.

I won an advanced copy of this book off of a Goodreads Giveaway. In this book, Rosalynn Carter discusses her advocacy for and observations of the changes in the mental health field since she first noticed what was lacking. As a graduate student getting my PhD in clinical psychology, I was very excited to win a copy of this and she what she had to say, and very excited that she was an advocate for mental health in general. The book, in my opinion, was a mixed bag. I cannot adequately review some of the things she goes over (symptoms of various illnesses, stigma, insurance issues, etc) because I've known these things and dealt with them for 3+ years, and so I can't stand back and say "How would someone who'd never thought about that react?" So I won't. However, I can give my 2 cents on what I do know. I was surprised and THRILLED at some of things Ms. Carter pointed out that is well-known within the mental health field, but rarely recognized outside of it, such as: 1. Psychiatrists get very little training in mental health 2. Psychiatrists often don't take in the environmental context of a mental health situation, sometimes leading to over or misdiagnosis. 3. Clients who utilize public community mental health are often given medication and a pat on the back and very little support other than that. 4. Resilience is really important for kids, and early mental health intervention can save a lot of money (and a lot of pain) later in life. 5. Insurance isn't the only barrier to treatment (though it is a big one.) Geography and culture are two other huge barriers. I was THRILLED THRILLED THRILLED that she mentioned these often unnoticed things about the mental health field.

For former First Lady Rosalynn Carter and her co-authors it must be bittersweet to report that thirty

years after Mrs. Carter and Senator Ted Kennedy succeeded in passing legislation to reform mental health care, the job remains "within our reach" but still undone. Carter is too tactful to point out that Ronald Reagan, the president who failed to fund this legislation, was nearly killed by a mentally-ill would-be assassin. But I digress. This book offers a readable overview of what we persist in calling our mental health "system." We see the impact of a variety of mental illnesses--depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, trauma substance addition-- on various populations, children (especially in foster care), young adults, parents, soldiers, and the elderly. Mrs. Carter has been working on this issue since her husband ran for governor of Georgia and she was beseeched by the families of mental patients to do something to provide more humane care. If our larger health care system is broken, the subset of mental health care functions only sporadically. And when it fails, the regrettable result is too often suicide, the most frequent form of violent death among young people in the U.S. Mrs. Carter clearly has worked hard to bridge the world between patients, their families and mental health professionals. She quotes freely from all of them to present the problems from all points of view, and she shares much of her own family experience here. But clearly, without the power of the White House or some powerful figure in Congress to drive this issue, it languishes. Meanwhile, we know more than ever about the brain, and there are promising treatments for many persistent problems.

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