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KAISER PERMANENTE SHOULD HAVE HIGHER PRIORITIES THAN WARRIORS ARENA DEAL

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When the Golden State Warriors arrive in San Francisco in a few months, they'll bring star power, prestige, excitement — and money. Lots and lots of money.

We've come to expect wealthy corporations like Chase Bank to pay hefty sums for naming rights to sports arenas. But we recently learned from Chronicle columnist Phil Matier that Kaiser Permanente, a nonprofit HMO, is putting up as much as $295 million to brand the area surrounding the new Chase Center.

That's right — a nonprofit, tax-exempt health care provider is spending nearly 300 million of its members' premium dollars to brand a sports complex. That's more than Levi's paid to brand the 49ers' stadium. It's twice what Staples paid to brand Los Angeles' Staples Center.

Kaiser's "Thrive City" will include restaurants, yoga studios, flu shot clinics, a farmers' market, and whatever else Kaiser can use to promote "total health."

But Kaiser's vision of total health doesn't seem to include mental health. While Kaiser spends millions to brand a sports stadium complex, those of us who work in Kaiser's psychiatric departments don't have enough resources in our clinics to provide all the services our patients need, deserve, and pay for — and Kaiser is doing precious little about it.

I work in child and family services at Kaiser in San Francisco, just a few miles from Thrive City. Our clinic is so understaffed that children with anxiety and depression have to wait more than a month for their first face-to-face appointments. We've begged and pleaded for more staff, but Kaiser has not hired more therapists and has not replaced those who have left. We went without a manager for 18 months and have had to cut more than two-thirds of our group therapy options because of understaffing.

We're in the midst of a mental health care crisis here at Kaiser — not only in San Francisco, but at Kaiser clinics statewide. Kaiser's mental health services are currently under a state-ordered outside monitoring program after they were found deficient in three consecutive state surveys and fined $4 million by the California Department of Managed Health Care for violating the state's Mental Health Parity Act.

In light of this, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in April unanimously passed a resolution calling on Kaiser Permanente to achieve "full parity for mental health patients."

"The mental health crisis in our city impacts every resident at every economic level," Supervisor Hillary Ronen said. "As the largest private provider of mental health care, Kaiser must ensure access to timely mental health care and early treatment to all its members. Without mental health parity across both our private and public systems, we will not be able to address the scale of untreated mental illness that we are experiencing in San Francisco today."

So it was disheartening, yet not surprising, that while Kaiser refused to heed the call of the Board of Supervisors or our pleas for more staff, news broke of the $295 million Warriors deal, as well as Kaiser's plans to build a $900 million corporate headquarters in Oakland. Kaiser executives are spending billions of dollars on buildings and branding deals, but they won't spend a fraction of that to help kids get care that could save their lives.

Three hundred million dollars could make a huge difference in the lives of San Francisco families. If Kaiser executives were truly interested in providing community benefits rather than branding opportunities, they would have sought the community's input as to how that money could have been spent.