



Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc.

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Kansas Poised to Transform the Community Mental Health System

Topeka— The way the public mental health system operates in Kansas has largely remained the same since Mental Health Reform in the early 1990s. Now, amid challenges such as increased demand for services, insufficient funding, and workforce shortages, the community mental health system is strained and in need of a new service delivery model to meet the needs of our communities.

In response to these challenges, Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCS) are poised to implement a new model of integrated care, the *Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic* (CCBHC). According to Greg Hennen, Past President of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas (ACMHCK) and Executive Director of Four County Mental Health Center, “This level of system transformation comes around only once every three to four decades.”

As such, we applaud Speaker Ryckman and other House leaders who had the forethought and wisdom to establish the Special Committee on Mental Health Modernization and Reform in 2020, tasked with analyzing the state’s behavioral health system and developing a plan to modernize the system. A key recommendation of the committee was to establish CCBHCs.

Based on that recommendation, as well as enthusiastic support from behavioral health providers, advocates, and other community partners, legislation was introduced during the 2021 Kansas legislative session to develop the CCBHC model in Kansas. We appreciate the work of legislative leadership who quickly passed the bill to implement the CCBHC model in Kansas, and particularly, the Chairs of both the House Health and Human Services committee, Representative Brenda Landwehr, and the Senate Public Health and Welfare committee, Senator Richard Hildebrand, who worked tirelessly to ensure the legislation will create a timely, Kansas-based approach to implementing the CCBHC model. Senate Substitute for House Bill 2208 not only establishes CCBHCs but also updates professional licensure requirements for behavioral health professionals, and creates both the licensure and funding mechanisms for rural emergency hospitals.

CCBHCs were specifically designed to address the challenges of the suicide crisis, overdose deaths, barriers to timely access to addiction and mental health treatment, delayed care, inadequate care for veterans, overburdened jail and emergency departments, and decades of funding cuts that have led to workforce shortages and providers struggling to meet the needs of their communities; all of which affect the Kansas mental health system.

In addition, CCBHCs provide a high return on investment. States with fully established CCBHC systems are already reporting promising outcomes, including increased access to care as well as decreased hospitalizations and emergency department visits for individuals experiencing mental health crises.

“There is an increased recognition that mental health services are an important component of the health care service array,” said Kyle Kessler, Executive Director of the ACMHCK. “The CCBHC model ensures that Kansans have access not only to mental health services but also to integrated care that emphasizes recovery, wellness, trauma-informed care, and physical-behavioral health integration. Equally as important, the model provides a sustainable approach for providing the necessary resources to providers.”

To date, six Kansas CMHCs have received federal grant funding to implement the CCBHC model, and additional CMHCs have applied or are planning to apply for future funding opportunities. This funding provides start-up resources to transform their service array, training, and staffing plans. The newly passed Kansas legislation will reform the system in a way to guarantee sustainability.

The first grantee, Four County Mental Health Center, is already seeing promising results. “Within the first six months of implementation, we have been able to increase the number of patients served, ensure coordination of primary care in conjunction with our behavioral health services, and provided care specifically targeted to meet the needs of veterans. These are just our preliminary results, and we are excited to continue on this path with all of our CMHC partners across the state,” Hennen said.

The Wyandot Behavioral Health Network is another grantee, and according to Randy Callstrom, CEO and ACMHCK President, “This is about serving our communities to the best of our ability and providing high quality treatment in a timely manner throughout our state. The CCBHC model provides us with the opportunity to truly be innovative and build the system in a way that can meet the needs of today as well as into the future to serve our children and grandchildren.”

To find your local CMHC, visit <http://www.acmhck.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CommunityMentalHealthCentersofKS-Revised-1-10-18.pdf>

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