

Mental Health 2020 (Article taken from Independence Daily Reporter - by Amanda Williams, News Editor)

The Association of Community Mental Health Center of Kansas is making a push to reform mental health care in Kansas. The initiative, called Mental Health 2020, centers on shoring up the funding needed to provide community based care to uninsured and underinsured people who qualify for the programs available.

Four County MHC is a private corporation licensed as a Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) by the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) and as a state licensed facility, one of their roles is serving as the mental health safety net for the state as well as local counties.

“The funding received from the State of Kansas is used exclusively for ‘targeted populations’ for uninsured/underinsured adults with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness as well as children with Severe Emotional Disturbance,” said Greg Hennen, Executive Director of Four County and president-elect of the Association of Community Health Centers of Kansas’ executive committee. He also noted that the state funding was reduced by half in 2009 and accounts for approximately 6 percent of the center’s annual budget.

“Funding received from each of the counties is used exclusively to provide discounted fees to the uninsured/underinsured citizens who need mental health services but are not part of the SPMI or SED populations,” he said. “Local county funding has dramatically decreased over the past five or six years while the demand for services by uninsured and underinsured citizens has increased.”

According to Hennen’s data, Four County has served 8,451 Montgomery County citizens over the course of the past five years.

“That accounts for one out of every four people residing in the county,” he noted. “The dramatic reduction in local mill levy support threatens to greatly diminish the discounted fees being available those in need in 2017. This poses a significant risk to public health since uninsured citizens will not access needed care if it is unaffordable.

Montgomery County’s subsidy for its citizens in 2017 appears to be about two-tenths of one percent of our annual budget with the counties of Wilson, Cowley, Elk and Chautauqua contributing to a combined total of 1.4 percent in support of their citizens.”

This same situation is playing out across the state, which is why Mental Health 2020 is pushing the state to fill in these funding gaps from the local sources. Their proposal seeks to restore state funding to behavioral health clinics serving the uninsured and underinsured, expand the number of psychiatry residents at the University of Kansas and return to operating all 200 beds of the Osawatomie State Hospital.

The first part of the proposal would be to allocate \$11 million in state lottery revenue to replace funding for CMHCs in the state, according to Kyle Kessler, Executive Director of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas.

“Caring for this population of vulnerable uninsured and underinsured people increases their independent living, increases successful employment and helps them remain contributing members of the local economy,” Hennen said. “Additionally, cost savings are realized when these individuals are functioning well and do not need to consume emergency room, law enforcement and local jail resources.

Hennen noted that the Mental Health 2020 initiative “does not relieve the local counties” from their responsibility to ensure safety net mental health services are accessible to the non-target population citizens but will still help control local costs associated with emergency room visits and crisis-related law enforcement interaction.