

Take statewide a solution that's already helping kids with mental illness.



In some parts of Texas, children with multiple challenges are finding great success in a coordinated, thoughtful approach that utilizes a family's strengths to deliver effective treatment and services.

When children struggle with serious mental health challenges and can't get help, it's much harder for them to succeed at home, at school, and in the community. Many times, they require services from several different programs and agencies. Too often, these services are disconnected, causing gaps in service and ineffective treatment. Fortunately, several Texas communities have changed the way they do business to help kids and families connect with the services and support they need using a "system of care" approach. The results they're seeing show why this way of helping kids with mental illness should be taken to scale.

What to Know

- Children with serious emotional disturbances *can* be successful in their communities, but it takes meeting their needs—not in a patchwork, uncoordinated way—but purposefully. **System of care is a method that's proven to work right here in Texas.**
- The system of care approach helps communities



work with families to plan and deliver a range of services, treatments, and supports that **address whatever barriers are getting in the way of a child's success.**

- Too often, without a system of care approach, the services kids and families really need are unaffordable. System of care has innovative funding strategies, so **children and families get the services they need affordably.**
- **Experts nationally and within Texas recommend the system of care approach** as a way to help kids with serious mental health concerns avoid unnecessary stays in hospitals, treatment centers, or even the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.¹
- More children could benefit from this strength-based, family-focused, youth-guided, and culturally informed model, and **Texas can help by expanding on what some of its communities have already started.**²

How to Make it Happen

- **Implement the Plan:** Texas has developed a road map already of how the system of care approach can be expanded statewide. If that happens, more communities would improve the way they help children with serious mental health concerns and their families. Putting the Texas System of Care Plan into action would better serve kids and families and save the state resources now going toward more costly care in hospitals, foster care settings, and juvenile justice facilities.³

- **Seek Texas experts' guidance.** In making decisions about building and sustaining an effective system of care, Texas should capitalize on the expertise that exists within its own ranks—several state agencies provide services to kids with mental health concerns—and on the ground in local communities, including from families themselves. A Texas System of Care Consortium, made up of these experts, could make recommendations on how the state can do better by its kids with mental health concerns.
- **Say “YES” to Youth Empowerment Services:** This Medicaid waiver from the federal government has been in place and working successfully since 2009. Currently, the waiver covers only a few counties. If more counties had the funding flexibility provided by the waiver, more kids with serious emotional disturbance would have access to mental health care and non-clinical supports promoted by the system of care approach.⁴ The Texas legislature needs to provide additional funding for more communities to take part, knowing that it leads to positive results: keeping kids out of hospitals and the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- **Strengthen Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs).**⁵ In every county, there is a CRCG, where agencies come together often to figure out a coordinated plan of action for children and families close to crisis. About half of kids referred to CRCGs have mental health concerns, and nearly 3 out of 4 struggle with issues like challenging behaviors or anger management.⁶ Texas can help these local groups serve families approaching a crisis by making training, technical assistance, and flexible funding available to CRCGs.
- **Engage family partners.** Parents who have had the experience of caring for a child with a mental health concern can be a supportive resource for other parents navigating the maze of programs. Texas has begun to use trained and certified Family Partners to assist families. It should expand the use of this effective, family-focused practice.

To learn more about this idea, check out: <http://tinyurl.com/MHcheck-up>

Thinking About Costs

When mentally ill kids get fragmented services that don't work, many youth go on to experience higher rates of school dropout and criminal justice involvement, and fewer options for future employment. All this is estimated to cost Texas in the end. Doing nothing leads us to spend an estimated \$13 billion per year on adult mental illness and substance abuse, a lot of it preventable if the problem had been addressed earlier in life.

Sources



"Thinking about Costs"

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