

# Behavioral Health

## Goals and Services

Programs and services within this issue area provide **prevention, intervention, and treatment to adults and children who have been impacted by issues of mental illness, substance abuse, and developmental disabilities.** Some examples of services included in this issue area are mental health, psychiatric, marriage and family counseling; addictions treatment; and substance abuse services.

TCHHS/VS has departmental and contracted programs that offer behavioral health services. Contracted services included in this issue area primarily provide mental health and substance use counseling services. Other services include peer support and substance abuse education. Please note that the scope of this summary is limited to the Department's social service investments and does not include the County's investment in behavioral health carried out via an Interlocal agreement with Austin Travis County Integral Care.

## Highlights of Community Conditions

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) estimates that nationally, one in four adults experience a mental health illness in a given year, while one in ten children have a serious mental or emotional disorder.<sup>126</sup> Applying these estimates to 2008 American Community Survey population data, 186,337 adults and 25,320 children are potentially in need of mental health services in Travis County.<sup>127</sup> However, NAMI reports that fewer than one third of adults and half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive any mental health services in a given year.<sup>128</sup>

In Travis County the need for behavioral health services is greater than the existing capacity to deliver these services. In 2008, the Austin Travis County Integral Care (formerly Austin/Travis County MHMR) **crisis hotline received more than 73,000 calls, a 4% increase from the year before. However, from 2006 to 2007, the number of crisis calls rose by nearly 20%.**<sup>129</sup> In mid-November of 2009, there were 887 people on the waiting list to receive services from the agency.<sup>130</sup> This is a substantial increase from the 2006 average number of individuals per month on the waiting list which was 487.<sup>131</sup> People often remain on the waiting list for about 13 months.<sup>132</sup> According to the Travis County Suicide Data Project, Travis County has the highest suicide rate of any metropolitan area in the state for the last several years for which data are available (2000-2005).<sup>133</sup>

**Local research on mental health provision documents an increasing need for mental health services, including the following:**

- A 28% increase in visits to local emergency rooms by individuals presenting primarily with mental health issues between 2006 and 2008;<sup>134</sup>

- A more than 20% increase in caseloads of local law enforcement teams specializing in working with mentally ill individuals from 2005 to 2008 (though some or all of this increase may be due to increased awareness of this community resource); and
- An increase in the number of individuals with serious mental illness in both adult and juvenile justice systems in Travis County.<sup>135</sup>

Behavioral health needs among local incarcerated populations are substantial. On any given day in the Travis County jail, **an average of 17-20% (or 400) inmates are in need of mental health or substance abuse services.**<sup>136</sup> Austin Travis County Corporation for Supportive Housing Texas Re-Entry Initiative reports that in 2008, 814 individuals officially assessed by jail staff and found to be mentally ill accounted for 2,580 arrests in the Travis County jail. Sixty-nine percent of these individuals had a co-occurring diagnosis, such as substance abuse, and all were homeless. These 814 individuals used 54,774 jail bed days in 2008. At \$48 per day, the total cost to the county for this group adds up to more than \$2.6 million dollars.<sup>137</sup>

Systemic factors exacerbating unmet behavioral healthcare needs include the nearly 219,000 (or 22%) of Travis County residents living without health insurance.<sup>138</sup> Although a number of economic indicators suggest that the economy is beginning to recover from the recent recession, Travis County residents are still experiencing stress from increases in job losses and foreclosures. Several studies have found that, across diverse populations, individuals facing significant economic strains are at an increased risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, irritability, anger, social isolation,<sup>139</sup> and suicidal ideation.<sup>140</sup> Stress also heightens the risk of relapse, starting, or prolonging substance abuse.<sup>141</sup> Behavioral health practitioners report an increase in the number of clients abusing substances since the inception of the recent economic recession.<sup>142</sup>

### ***Other Gaps in Service***

The local rate of **public psychiatric beds** available to the population (11.4 per 100,000) is below the Austin Travis County Integral Care and the Mayor's Mental Health Task Force Monitoring Committee (MMHTFMC) standards for the Travis County community of 15.2 beds per 100,000 in population.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, the MMHTFMC reports that there are shortages in the number of **mental health professionals** practicing in Travis County.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the Travis County public hospital system offers very limited, **dedicated psychiatric services** compared to counties of similar population size, according to the MMHTFMC.<sup>145</sup>

**Substance abuse services** in Travis County are also inadequate for the population. There are no dedicated detoxification services in Travis County,<sup>146</sup> and Travis County residential substance abuse treatment facilities operate with substantial waiting lists, which "generally extend two months and beyond."<sup>147</sup>

### ***Youth***

It is estimated that only half of youth with mental health issues actually receive treatment. Many who are not treated end up in the juvenile justice system; the National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates that 70 percent of youths in the juvenile justice system have at least

one mental health disorder with at least 20 percent experiencing significant functional impairment from a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.<sup>148</sup>

**Of all the calls requesting behavioral health assistance to the local 2-1-1 system, the top request from November of 2008 through November 2009 was for counseling for adolescents and youth.**<sup>149</sup> At the same time, results from a recently released survey examining school-based behavioral health services indicate that many Texas school staff are not aware of existing behavioral health services available at their schools.

### ***Veterans***

Returning veterans often have a number of behavioral health issues. These are often exacerbated by or otherwise linked to injuries they may have sustained in combat. More than 2 million soldiers have served or are expected to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan and an estimated **12 to 20 percent of these soldiers will return with post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression.**<sup>150</sup>

A report released by the Veterans Intervention Project, a Travis County collaboration of various agencies, indicates that **about 150 veterans are incarcerated in the Travis County jail at any given time. One-third of them were arrested two or more times in the 90-day period** in which the study was conducted. Of the charges filed against veterans, more than a quarter (27%) were felony charges. Additionally, more than 34% of all charges filed against the veterans arrested were related to drug and alcohol use: DWI, possession, public intoxication, vehicular manslaughter and other related crimes. Most of the veterans captured in the report had not obtained services of any kind, either from the Veteran's Administration or from other service providers, such as counseling or substance abuse services.<sup>151</sup>

### **Programs Included in the Community Impact Report**

The following contracted service providers and programs will be included in the 2009 Community Impact Report Part II to be released in March 2010.

- Austin Child Guidance Center: Children's Outpatient Mental Health and Evaluation Services
- Capital Area Mental Health Center: Low-Cost, No-Session-Limit Outpatient Counseling
- Out Youth: Youth Development
- Worker's Assistance Program, Inc.: Youth Advocacy / Creating Lasting Family Connections
- Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Greater Austin: YW Counseling and Referral Center
- Youth and Family Alliance (d.b.a. LifeWorks): Counseling