



## **Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department**

1304 S 25th Street • Edinburg, Texas 78539  
Tel: (956) 383-6221 • Fax: (956) 383-8864

**Ivan Meléndez, M.D., M.B.A.**  
*Health Authority / Chief Physician*

**Eduardo Olivarez**  
*Chief Administrative Officer*

September 30, 2014

### **To Whom It May Concern:**

The Hidalgo County Commissioners Court and Hidalgo County Health & Human Services Department would like to express our enthusiastic support for the proposal submitted by the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley Medical School. This initiative will establish a sustainable, community-based model of care for adolescents with triple diagnosis (mental, addictive and medical disorders). The John Austin Pena Memorial Center for Primary Care and Substance Abuse, a county-owned facility located in Edinburg, Texas is a thirteen thousand (13,000) square foot clinical building designed to house a unique integrated, team-based care team that will serve the County's adolescent medical, psychological and social needs.

Based on an inter-professional model of care, UTRGV SOM will levy resources from two Family Medicine Residencies, the Psychiatry Residency, the UTRGV Cooperative Pharmacy Program, the UTRGV Department of Social Work, and the Hidalgo County Health & Human Services Department. The UTHSCSA UTRGV Doctors Hospital at Renaissance (DHR) Family Medicine Residency and the UTHSCSA UTRGV McAllen Family Medicine Residency have adequate resources that include two behavioral scientists, a Clinical Integrated Medical Family Therapy PhD resident and over thirty residents and 15 faculty that are not only able to provide mental health and primary care but make the clinic a learning environment for inter-professional care.

A confluence of factors relating to socioeconomic, access to medical care, rapid population growth and disproportionate high rates of chronic and infectious diseases (diabetes, obesity, tuberculosis, measles, etc.) combine to make this border area, known as the Lower Rio Grande Valley, one of the most medically underserved in the country. Hidalgo County has a population of 815,996 with 34% living in poverty, 91% Hispanic, 85% Spanish-speaking, and 34% of the population younger than 18 years old. Adolescent mental health care needs greatly exceed the resources of the County. This initiative offers an excellent opportunity to provide sustainable care for a vulnerable population in our community.

With the resources and experience of the Hidalgo County Health & Human Services Department, the clinic can not only provide mental health and primary care to a demographic that does not traditionally seek preventive and mental health services, but will also prepare the next generation of health care professionals to more fully understand and address these significant health challenges. Understanding the interface between environment and human disease, and public health's critical role in population-based approaches to disease prevention and health promotion are important hallmarks of this initiative that will add to the educational experience of inter-professional students. Through

mental health-care, primary care, and screenings for major disease combined with use of information technologies that provides culturally and linguistically appropriate health information and addresses health literacy impediments, measurable improvements in health status will be achieved with our at-risk adolescents with triple diagnosis (mental, addictive and medical disorders).

As a member of the inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional consortium involved in the planning and implementation of this initiative, **Hidalgo County is pleased to put forth the following commitment: Provide the John Austin Pena Memorial Center for Primary Care and Substance Abuse for the use of treating adolescents with triple diagnoses.**

I look forward to working with the outstanding consortium that has been assembled, which includes representation from academics, public health, environmental health, social work and the health professions (medicine, nursing, pharmacy and dietetics). The need for well-informed, culturally sensitive health professionals, who understand the important roles of public health, social services and a safe environment in their patients' health and well-being, especially for adolescents with triple diagnoses, is particularly acute in this U.S.-Mexico Border region. Through this initiative, and knowing the outstanding commitment of the consortium members, I am confident this project will have a permanent, positive impact on the future of health professions education, medicine and public health—for this region and the nation.

Sincerely,

Ramon Garcia  
Hidalgo County Judge