

Williamson County Mental Health Task Force's Mental Health Requests

1. Continuation of Crisis Redesign Funding

We respectfully request that the funding initiated during the 80th Legislative Session be continued. With this funding we have been able to support and/or improve and expand the following services.

***24-Hour Crisis Hotline (\$27,000)** - With expanded hours, the Crisis Hotline triaged 11,725 calls in 2008 with qualified mental health professionals, and deployed services to 1,847 residents of Williamson County. Calls are received by a professional who can assess the situation and deploy the appropriate crisis services when needed, thereby allowing a cost savings of \$37,560 from the previous year. This is a 39% increase in calls and 168% increase in crisis services provided from the previous year.

***Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MOT) (\$125,000)** - The County's existing and successful MOT was able to add a Masters Level Counselor and administrative position hours which increased the capacity of the team by 700 hours of crisis services per year. 1,227 individuals received crisis services that are maintained 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The expansion has allowed Williamson County residents in crisis to receive face-to-face help within 1 hour of a Hotline call. The MOT works in tandem with the Williamson County Sheriff's Crisis Intervention Team to link individuals in crisis with appropriate services which prevents escalation or interaction with the justice system or first responders, allowing an annual savings of **\$2,169,100. For every \$1 spent, approximately \$2 is saved in diversions from state hospitals, emergency rooms and jail.** Prior to the creation of the MOT the *State Hospital bed utilization rate for Williamson County was 112% and is now dropped to 68%.*

***Public Service Announcement Campaign (No additional funding needed)** - A PSA has been filmed and continues to air on television informing Williamson County residents of the services that are available. The "There's Hope and Help" campaign contributed to the increase in Hotline calls. Additional PSA's and media outreach is upcoming.

***Crisis Respite Center Services (\$474,450)** - Through a collaborative effort by Williamson County, Bluebonnet Trails MHMR, Georgetown Healthcare Foundation, Seton Williamson, Scott & White, St. David's Georgetown and Round Rock, and Cedar Park Regional Medical Center Hospitals, we were selected through a competitive bid process to receive funding for a 10-bed crisis respite center. The respite center has diverted an average of 26 persons/month from local emergency rooms which is expected to result in an approximate annual savings of \$325,100. In addition, 8 diversions from the State Hospital system have occurred per month, resulting in an annual savings of \$89,300. *The total annual savings is estimated at \$414,400.*

2. Support Expanded Community Based Outpatient Services (\$206,000)

With available competitive funding, Williamson County would like to fill a gap in service for the following areas:

*Expand outpatient services for individuals discharged from inpatient treatment. Currently only 39% of individuals receive outpatient services which increases recidivism through the mental health systems.

*Provide outpatient services for individuals suffering from a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance addictions. It has been identified that 56% of individuals in inpatient treatment have a dual diagnosis. Continued funding of programs such as Outreach Screening Assessment and Referral (OSAR) will help provide treatment opportunities for adults and children with addictions.

3. Support Psychiatric Residency Training Programs (\$50,000)

Williamson County has a shortage of mental health professionals with only 2.2 psychiatrists per 100,000 population. A psychiatric residency program would help meet a critical need and expand available services which are supported through Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance. In addition to filling a vital gap, this would provide a substantial economic impact, up to \$1.30 return for every \$1.00 invested.

4. Support Services for Returning Veterans and their Families

Williamson County has seen a significant increase in veterans returning from multiple deployments that are in need of mental health services. Funding support for local access to counseling services through veterans' community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) can help reduce the risks of alcohol abuse, substance abuse addiction, domestic violence, job loss, family dissolution, homelessness, incarceration and suicide.

5. Changes Affecting the Justice System

Portions of the Health and Safety Code is outdated with chapters that contradict each other. Recodification of State laws is necessary to bring them into agreement and make them more understandable.

Prosecutors would be more willing to participate in jail diversion programs if there were more options available for diversion that did not jeopardize public safety. Partnerships with private and non-profit entities to increase the number of group homes where individuals on probation can receive long-term residential care and monitoring of medication compliance would be beneficial. Also, continued funding for Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical and Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) to assist adults and children with treatment and reentry into the community from the criminal justice systems discourages recidivism.

The State of Texas should support "Duty to Accept" legislation to remove mentally ill individuals from county jails and place them into the state mental health system within a fourteen (14) day period to receive appropriate mental health treatment.

6. Conclusion

We believe that partnerships with the State, local government, Mental Health Authorities, private sector, and non-profits are vital in addressing the mental health needs of Texans, and in doing so duplication of valuable resources can be avoided.