

Expanding Behavioral Healthcare Facilities and Resources

Initiative Summary Statement:

Address the mental health needs of the community by expanding behavioral health care facilities and resources for residents, enhancing the continuum of care within Lee County and the municipalities.

Initiative Description:

Objective: This initiative focuses on improving the quality of life and well-being of the community by expanding access to behavioral health care treatment facilities and resources.

Behavioral health refers to the mental health and well-being of individuals. One in five U.S. adults experience mental illness each year,⁸ and extreme weather events increase mental health problems, including among people with no history of mental illness and those at risk.⁹ Treatment of mental illnesses and conditions requires access to the appropriate resources and facilities. Access to mental health resources requires a coordinated system of care with a variety of inpatient, outpatient, residential, peer support services, crisis stabilization, recovery treatment facilities and telehealth access to comprehensively address behavioral health care needs.

Need: The County lacks a comprehensive system of care for behavioral health services. A 2020 *Community Health Needs Assessment* by the Florida Department of Health identified mental health as the top priority within Lee County and surrounding municipalities; the

⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP21-07-01-003, NSDUH Series H-56). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Mental Health and Stress-Related Disorders*.

June 18, 2020. Retrieved from

https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/mental_health_disorders.htm#:~:text=Mental%20illness%20is%20one%20of%20the%20major%20causes,phenomenon%20known%20as%20%E2%80%9Ccommon%20reactions%20to%20abnormal%20events.%E2%80%9D

report recommends facility and service improvements to improve care options for residents. Residents of the County have access to only half of the number of mental health providers including psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, counselors, and other mental health providers who specialize in mental health care compared to the national average. Under blue skies the region had capacity and access gaps to address behavioral health, and it has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and Hurricane Ian. Research from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests between one-third and a half of those directly exposed to natural disasters will develop mental distress within five years of the disaster, meaning that Hurricane Ian has likely increased the need for mental health services in the County. Without a coordinated system of care that can proactively identify emerging issues and direct patients to appropriate and timely treatment, persons with serious mental illness often end up in crisis. While not a universal outcome of mental health crisis, some patients with mental health illnesses do have increased contact with law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies are on the front lines of addressing mental health crises which adds to the responsibilities of those agencies, contributes to overcrowding of correctional facilities, and can contribute to adverse outcomes for patients who are not immediately connected to medical professionals. SalusCare, Inc. and Park Royal Hospital are the only two providers that can receive patients involuntarily admitted under the Baker Act in Lee County and its municipalities. Even with the Crisis Stabilization Units at SalusCare facilities, there are not enough adult nor pediatric beds to handle the demand of behavioral health services and needs of the County residents.

Included in this initiative is an effort to address the behavioral health worker shortage by supporting the education and training of a workforce.

Regional Approach: The regional approach to address the mental health needs goes beyond just one single funding source and will require additional bed space, acute care, and residential treatment facilities for those experiencing mental illness or substance use disorder. The *Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery Action Plan* identified the unmet needs of the County, post- Hurricane Ian, related to mental health resources and proposed significant funding to establish a system of coordinated care. A Crisis Intervention Center is one example of a facility that could be constructed to serve the entire community's behavioral health needs. Due to the changing nature and acuity of behavioral health care needs of an individual, coordination of services and providers is necessary. A coordinated system of care could also help break down barriers to care such as lack of transportation, economic barriers such as low incomes or lack of insurance, and mental health stigma so that community members can connect with appropriate resources.

There should be continued coordination with neighboring counties and their healthcare systems as steps are taken to implement this initiative. The Health and Wellness Coalition is currently looking for regional assets in other counties to augment behavioral healthcare.

Impact: The resilience of the community to bounce back from Hurricane Ian and thrive even when faced by future disasters depends on its ability to heal and support those with mental health conditions. The current providers of behavioral health care services in the County are offering substantial and meaningful services to the residents who need treatment. Additional facilities and resources are needed as the region recovers from Hurricane Ian and prepares for future hazards. Non-emergency helpline services such as 211, to connect individuals with social services, should be established and easily accessible. However, stigma and societal pressures still exist for mental health conditions and add barriers to those who seek treatment. With additional facilities and resources to address mental health concerns, the stigma of seeking treatment can be reduced by normalizing access to mental health care. Breaking down barriers to access and the "right-sized" form of mental healthcare will also be contributing factors in this goal.

Key Considerations:

- Align efforts to establish and expand mental health facilities with the Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery funding to establish a continuum of care for behavioral health services.
- Plan for the increase in mental healthcare need in a post-disaster environment.
- Include key stakeholders who currently serve as front-line responders in planning to ensure new resources address needs.
- Enhance gray sky mental health resources:
 - Contemplate other approaches related to disaster mental health which can increase training and mental health resources to get people training.
 - During disasters, mental health services via telehealth are a viable option for addressing immediate needs, so long as internet connectivity is available.

Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Health & Social Services, Planning & Capacity

Stakeholders:

- Florida Department of Children and Families
- Central Florida Behavioral Health Network
- Florida Department of Health

- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Lee County Department of Health
- Lee County School District
- Lee Health, Salus Care, Centerstone, Florida Behavioral Health, and other health and mental health providers
- Collaboratory
- United Way of Lee, Hendry, and Glades Counties

Potential Funding Sources:

- United States Department of Health and Human Services
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
 - Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR)
- Florida Division of Emergency Management
- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Department of Children and Families

Resources:

- [Community Needs Health Assessment \(2020\)](#), Florida Department of Health