



# NH Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative

## SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH: THE SYSTEM OF CARE APPROACH

### Coming together, transforming our behavioral health system with New Hampshire children, youth, families, and communities

#### The chosen response to a broken system

More than one in five youth in the U.S. have a mental health or substance use challenge with severe distress and/or impairment. For these youth, the disorder is so severe it impedes their ability to do well in school, at home, or in their communities.<sup>1</sup> Most of these children, youth, and their families do not receive the supports and services they need. The consequence? Many youth end up hospitalized, out of school, in trouble with the law, homeless, or addicted.

Children and youth with behavioral challenges encounter multiple systems, including health, mental health, education, child welfare, juvenile justice, community organizations, and social service systems. Yet these systems seldom work together and often have competing philosophies and different approaches. In many communities, what we like to think of as a behavioral health system is really not a coordinated system, but a siloed provider array with waiting lists and delays as well as shortages of providers. All too often, children and youth end up in the state hospital or waiting in emergency rooms for days because their needs cannot be met in the community.

These system failures are expensive, ineffective, and harmful to the development and health of our children and youth.

The New Hampshire Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative, a coalition of over sixty organizations and hundreds of individuals, has begun to

transform the behavioral health system. The Collaborative has embraced a national framework that was developed by children's mental health advocates, experts, and policy makers.

This evidence-based approach, called system of care, is designed to pull together the disparate service entities into one organized, coherent response. This response is based on what families want and need. Research shows that the system of care approach is a smarter investment that brings better outcomes for youth, as well as their families and communities.

#### System of care defined

The system of care is an array of services and supports for children and youth with mental health challenges and their families. Its emphasis is on helping the child or youth to function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life. It provides

- A spectrum of effective, **community-based services and supports**
- **Meaningful partnerships with families and youth** at the service planning, service delivery, and policy levels
- Services and supports that are easily accessible through a **coordinated network** that meets diverse **cultural and linguistic needs**<sup>2</sup>

The system of care fundamentally changes the way services are made available to youth and their families:

- From fragmented to coordinated,

and from categorical to multi-disciplinary

- From out of home, hospital, and institutional placements to in-home supports and community-based inclusion
- From crisis services to prevention and early intervention
- From focusing only on the youth to focusing on the youth, family, and community

#### System of care approach – A proven solution

A large review of system of care projects found the approach effective for children and youth who have mental health challenges. Outcomes for youth included

- Decreased behavioral problems, suicide rates, substance use, and juvenile justice involvement
- Increased school attendance and stability in living situations, and improved academics

Outcomes for families include reduced caregiver strain and improved family functioning. The study also found system improvements, including an expanded array of home- and community-based and individualized services, increased family and youth involvement in services, increased care coordination, and increased use of evidence-based practices.<sup>3</sup>

1 Merikangas, Kathleen Ries et al. (2010). Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication--Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 49, no.10: 980-989. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20855043>

2 Stroul, B., Blau, G., & Friedman, R. M. (2010). *Updating the system of care concept and philosophy*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child Development, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health.

3 Stroul, B., Goldman, S., Pires, S., & Manteuffel, B. (2012). *Expanding Systems of care: Improving the lives of children, youth, and families*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child Development, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health

## This all sounds expensive. What does a system of care approach cost?

The system of care approach has been found to be more cost effective because

- Care and services are being better utilized
- Multiple providers are coordinating their efforts
- Services build the family's resilience and capabilities to help their children

Children and youth served with the system of care approach are less likely to use expensive services. They are less likely to be hospitalized, use emergency departments, drop out of school, or get arrested.<sup>4</sup>

One example of state savings is from Maine. Maine evaluated their system of care wraparound approach for youth with serious mental health challenges, and found a reduction of 29% in Medicaid spending. This was mostly due to decreases in inpatient and residential treatment expenses.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, not providing funding for a statewide system of care is expensive for New Hampshire, considering the costs of housing a child in the state hospital or incarcerating a youth at the Sununu Youth Services Center. These placements cost hundreds of thousands dollars for a youth for a year.

## New Hampshire is ready to scale up its system of care approach

The Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative is the focal point for organizing New Hampshire's system of care framework, as outlined in the Collaborative's strategic plan. The system of care brings change at many levels including changes in

- State leadership accountabilities and interagency coordination
- Services and supports and provider practices at the community level
- Financing and resources
- Workforce capacity

### ■ Family advocacy and outreach

Collaborative partners have received a number of federal grants that support development of the infrastructure for a coordinated system of care. However, it is up to the state and communities to support the ongoing implementation and operation of the system of care.

So far the development of New Hampshire's system of care includes

- Expanded family-to-family support, education, and leadership programs
- A youth-to-youth training and leadership program
- Use of a family-driven and youth-guided wraparound approach of intensive care coordination for children and youth with complex behavioral health challenges and their families. See the Issue Brief "Supporting our Children and Youth: Wraparound."
- Preparation of a Medicaid 1915(i) state plan amendment. This amendment would support a wider array of services and staffing of wraparound.
- Training for providers in cultural and linguistic competence
- School-based initiatives that employ a multi-tiered public health approach and integrate behavioral health services into schools
- Legislation fundamental to state leaders building the system of care

## Everyone plays a role in making the system of care a reality for children and youth

Making the system of care a reality in New Hampshire requires support for the following Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative policy initiatives:

- Defining state agency leadership to more comprehensively address children's and youth's behavioral health needs with policy-making and oversight
- Medicaid changes, including the

### 1915(i) state plan amendment

- A training network, one aspect of developing our workforce capacity.
- Mechanisms for funding for children's mental health services across systems, and reinvesting savings in children's behavioral health

For more information about the system of care for children with behavioral health needs in New Hampshire, please visit [NH4Youth.org](http://NH4Youth.org).



4 Stroul, B., Pires, S., Boyce, S., Krivelyova, A., & Walrath, C. (2014). Return on Investment in systems of care for children with behavioral health challenges. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child Development, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health.

5 Ibid.