

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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**West Central Regional Human Service Center in Bismarck now offers behavioral health assessments without appointments**

BISMARCK, N.D. – When people seek help for an addiction or mental health need, having to wait for care can derail and delay their recovery.

In response to statewide concerns about the challenges people encounter when they seek behavioral health treatment, the North Dakota Department of Human Services has been working to connect people to services more quickly. This month, West Central Human Service Center (WCHSC) in Bismarck became the fifth regional center to offer behavioral health assessments without appointments.

“Timely behavioral health care is vital to providing quality services so that lives are improved and people recover,” said Chief Clinics Officer Rosalie Etherington, Ph.D., who provides leadership over the regional human service centers, which are North Dakota’s public behavioral health service delivery system.

Etherington explained how Open Access works. “People who walk in seeking an assessment during open access hours are screened. If a person has acute or severe symptoms, we provide immediate service that day. For example, a pregnant woman with a substance use disorder would be served right away,” said Etherington.

People with less urgent, but serious needs are seen within a day or two. People with non-urgent needs may have a longer wait, or may be referred to other behavioral health providers in the community, she said.

WCHSC Regional Director Brad Brown said the center offers Open Access behavioral health assessments on Mondays and Thursdays from 8 to 10:30 a.m., and Tuesdays and Wednesdays from noon to 2:30 p.m. at the center located at 1237 W. Divide Ave., Suite 5, in Bismarck. The center’s parking lot and entrance face Schafer Street.

Brown said WCHSC has been using the Open Access process for a couple weeks, and it is reducing client wait times and is more efficient.

“Before we started this, it could take up to four weeks between when a person called seeking help and when we could schedule an assessment. The longer the wait time, the less likely people were to keep their appointments. The key is to engage people in services right away when they are motivated,” Brown said.

He said people also meet with business office staff, and the entire visit takes about two hours.

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Brown and Etherington said some people are referred to other community behavioral health service providers.

“We have limited resources and focus public treatment services on those individuals with the highest level of need and complexity and the fewest resources,” Etherington explained.

She said the regional human service centers concentrate on serving pregnant women with substance use disorders and youth and adults with serious and persistent mental illness and substance use disorders, including I-V drug users. In some cases, other providers cannot or will not serve them.

She said the department’s goal is to provide the Open Access service model statewide at its regional centers by the end of the summer.

Regional human service center information, including open access hours at participating centers in Bismarck, Fargo, Jamestown, Minot and Williston, is online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/regionalhsc/>.

Fees for some services at the regional centers are adjusted for income, ability to pay, and the number of household members. Medicare, Medicaid, and insurance are accepted.

WCHSC serves a 10-county area that includes Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan, and Sioux counties, the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, and part of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

The center employs about 137 people and served about 4,426 people during the 2016 State Fiscal Year that ended June 30, 2016.

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