

## **PROJECT ABSTRACT**

**Project Title:** North Dakota's Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program

**Applicant Organization Name:** North Dakota Department of Health, 600 East Boulevard Avenue, Dept. 301, Bismarck, ND 58505-0200

**Project Director:** Kim Mertz, Section Chief, Healthy and Safe Communities, Title V/Maternal and Child Health Director

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**Grant Program Funds Requested:** Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program – HRSA-18-122, \$445,000/year for 5 years

### **Problem:**

As reported in the 2018 *North Dakota Behavioral Health Systems Study*, a common theme cited is the need for a more comprehensive continuum of outpatient services for children and youth. Stakeholders noted that child and youth services are often “swallowed up” by a systems emphasis on adult services. Stakeholders discussed a lack of infrastructure and coordination to support early childhood mental health for very young children. In many of the most rural areas of the state, there is not a medical clinic infrastructure in which a primary care physician can treat the medical or behavioral health needs of youth.

### **Goals and Objectives:**

The primary goals/objectives of North Dakota's Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program are to: 1) increase telebehavioral health services to children and adolescents living in underserved areas of the state; 2) to extend knowledge to pediatric primary care professionals across the state for the early identification, diagnosis, treatment and referral of mental health disorders; 3) to include direct school-based delivery of telehealth services due to the shortage of healthcare providers and the lack of an infrastructure for primary care clinics, and 4) to enhance existing partnerships and develop new relationships with entities that have similar goals and expectations to this program.

### **Methodology:**

Development of an integrated behavioral health team will be established to provide telebehavioral health care services. Behavioral health team members will include a licensed addiction counselor and mental health therapist (licensed mental health professionals), a social worker (case coordinator) and a part-time information technology specialist to support the project across the state.

### **Coordination:**

The North Dakota Department of Health will contract with Prairie St. John's to provide leadership expertise to implement program activities and expectations. Prairie St. John's offers a full psychiatric and addiction continuum of care. Additional partners included other state agencies, health care organizations, insurers, family groups, pediatric primary care providers, behavioral health clinicians, professional associations, etc. The North Dakota's Children's Behavioral Health Task Force will be utilized as the program's advisory committee.

### **Evaluation:**

Evaluation efforts will focus on four areas: program development, needs assessment/training, access to care, and monitoring/evaluating.