

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Northwest Human Service Center in Williston opens access to behavioral health assessments

BISMARCK, N.D. – When people need help, they don't want to wait. To reduce wait times and increase access to behavioral health services, the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Northwest Human Service Center (NWHSC) in Williston is now offering mental health assessments without appointments.

The Open Access Services initiative started in mid-September and builds on a related effort. Last year, the department's eight regional human service centers started providing walk-in addiction assessments on designated weekdays. Assessment days and times vary by center.

Northwest Human Service Center provides open access for both mental health assessments and substance addiction assessments Tuesdays through Thursdays between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m.

"By offering open access assessment services, we can engage people in treatment and services earlier, and this can prevent some crises. We can also provide that important initial contact when individuals are ready to get help and to make positive, healthy changes in their lives," said Northwest Human Service Center Director Laurie Gotvaslee.

Gotvaslee said the open access behavioral health assessments have another benefit. They reduce no-shows for assessments, and this allows behavioral health professionals to actually serve more people.

"The open access assessments help us serve new clients more quickly and manage staffing more efficiently," she said.

People who are seeking services at NWHSC are encouraged to call the center at 701-774-4600, or toll-free at 800-231-7724, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or they can go to the center located at 316 Second Ave. W., in Williston during open access hours.

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In the first four weeks after launching Open Access Services for mental health assessments, NWHSC provided immediate care to 38 individuals seeking services, while maintaining their existing client caseload. The center continues to monitor client engagement, no-show and cancelation rates, and follow-through with services.

According to Gotvaslee, the walk-in assessments are especially beneficial for individuals whose work schedules vary or who have limited access to transportation or child care that may prevent them from following through with assessments scheduled too far in advance.

Chief Clinics Officer Rosalie Etherington said the department plans to expand Open Access Services for mental health assessments to all eight of its regional human service centers during the 2015-2017 biennium.

The Department of Human Services operates regional human service centers in Bismarck, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Minot, and Williston. Some centers also have rural outreach offices. Staffs provide an array of community-based behavioral health services and other human services to North Dakotans either directly or through contracts with other service providers.

Behavioral health professionals at the regional centers serve those individuals with the greatest treatment needs. These include adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbance, adults and children with both substance use disorders and serious mental illness, pregnant women with substance use disorders, and I.V. drug users.

Fees for some services are adjusted for income, ability to pay, and number of household members. Insurance is accepted if available.

Regional human service center information is available online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/regionalhsc/>.

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