

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Robinson Recovery Program addiction treatment options grow as agency shifts from contract to vouchers

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services announced plans to expand residential addiction treatment options through the Robinson Recovery Program by shifting away from a contract with ShareHouse Inc. in Fargo, to a voucher-funded program.

“We are sustaining needed residential addiction treatment services, but providing the service in a different way,” said the department’s Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness.

Beginning this month, people can access residential treatment services not only from ShareHouse at its Fargo facility, but also from other approved voucher service providers in the state. Participating Substance Use Disorder Voucher providers are listed online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/mhsa/sud-voucher-providers.pdf.

To avoid any disruption in treatment, Sagness said the department has temporarily extended its Robinson Recovery Program contract with ShareHouse for 90 days. This will allow current clients to complete treatment at ShareHouse.

The change was supported by ShareHouse, which notified the department last fall that it could no longer continue to provide Robinson Recovery Program services at the approved 2015-2017 contracted rate of \$190 per day. When the department requested proposals from other interested providers, no other entities responded.

During the 2017 North Dakota legislative session, lawmakers provided \$2.31 million in the department’s appropriations bill (House Bill 1012) for the Robinson Recovery Program, and also added Section 30. It authorizes the department to use other providers if the current contractor is unable to continue providing the services as specified in the contract.

“The voucher is more flexible and offers a number of benefits,” said Sagness. “It allows more providers to serve individuals. This provides more treatment and recovery support options closer to home. This in turn, can help people maintain their employment, retain housing, be closer to their children, and stay connected to other family members and friends who can be important sources of support during and after treatment.”

“This is individualized care. The voucher pays for the services each qualifying individual needs. The goal is recovery, and it isn’t one size fits all,” she said.

The department’s goal is to provide services to people who need them in a way that is most effective.

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Sagness said that when services were contracted with one provider at one location, transportation was a barrier for both individuals seeking treatment and their families, if they did not live in the Fargo region. It also drove up costs for partner agencies, including county social service offices, which are responsible for arranging visits between parents and children in the counties' care.

To address addiction treatment needs, the 2017 Legislature appropriated \$2.8 million for the voucher program, and methadone and other medication-assisted treatment services. This is an increase from the department's 2015-2017 appropriation, which included \$750,000 for the voucher program that was subsequently reduced in half as part of the department's budget allotment. During the 2017 legislative session, lawmakers restored \$200,000 for the 2015-2017 biennium, which ended June 30, 2017.

Sagness and other department officials hope that the increased investment in voucher funding encourages service providers to expand to underserved areas of North Dakota.

The state's Substance Use Disorder Voucher Program can be used at participating approved providers and pays different rates for services including assessments, individual, group and family treatment; room and board; methadone maintenance; recovery coach services; transportation; and other individualized recovery support services.

To qualify for voucher program services, an individual must be a North Dakota resident, age 18 or older who is determined by a licensed professional to need addiction treatment and recovery services. Participating individuals cannot earn more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, which is \$24,120 a year for a household of one.

The voucher program is intended to help individuals with limited resources overcome financial hurdles limiting access to treatment. People may qualify if they have applied for Medicaid, but have not been approved yet, have a third party payment resource like private insurance that does not cover treatment costs, or do not qualify for Medicaid and have no other way to pay for treatment.

Voucher program details are online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/mentalhealth/index.html.

The 2005 North Dakota legislature first allocated funds to develop and implement a long-term 20-bed residential treatment program for adults addicted to methamphetamine or other controlled substances. The program was named in honor of state Sen. Larry Robinson, a proponent of longer term, evidence-based residential treatment options for people recovering from substance addiction including methamphetamine addiction.

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