

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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North Dakota Department of Human Services issues report on behavioral health system capacity

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services’ Behavioral Health Division today released an evaluation of the capacity of the state’s behavioral health system to prevent and respond to behavioral health challenges and promote the well-being of North Dakotans. The report points to a shortage of prevention and early intervention services—in particular, activities focused on mental illness prevention and social and emotional wellness—and an overreliance on residential and inpatient services.

“In North Dakota and across the nation, states are pouring most of their behavioral health care resources into residential, inpatient and other institution-based services. But upstream and alternative solutions can often reduce or prevent the need for these types of intensive services,” said Bevin Croft, Ph.D., Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) project director. “Without a comprehensive continuum of outpatient services, it’s hard for people to get access to timely, effective care, and timeliness is key. Without it, people can experience devastating and unnecessary disruptions to their home lives, work lives and life goals.”

The evaluation, conducted by HSRI, examined publicly available data as well as peer-reviewed research articles and national literature. HSRI also analyzed service utilization and expenditure patterns using North Dakota Medicaid claims and other public behavioral health service utilization data. To fully assess the system and identify gaps, they interviewed 120 stakeholders around the state, including service users and their family members, providers, and representatives from state and local agencies. They also convened a talking circle with representatives from four tribal nations.

The report details a series of recommendations, several of which focus on the benefits of early intervention as well as more comprehensive outpatient services for children and youths. The report also provides several recommendations for increasing health equity, addressing troubling workforce shortages that continue to impede the system, and expanding the state’s network of peer support services. It also offers recommendations for training and working with other system agencies to help responders recognize and appropriately support people with behavioral health issues, preventing their unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system.

Croft will present the report findings at the interim Human Services Committee meeting at 8:35 a.m. April 24 in the Roughrider Room of the Capitol in Bismarck.

“This report points to a number of areas where the state is moving in the right direction, while also providing recommendations we can implement to support individuals’ recovery in their homes and communities—including evidence-based approaches such as peer support, telebehavioral health, supported housing and employment, and integrated physical and behavioral health services,” said DHS Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness.

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This report serves as a component of interim legislative committee studies during the 2017-2018 interim.

“Behavioral health, including mental illness and substance use disorders, indiscriminately affects our families and our neighbors,” said Sen. Judy Lee, chair of the interim Health Services Committee. “Businesses need a healthy workforce; students need to come from healthy homes in order to learn; and parents may need support to find effective care for their children who may have challenges. Behavioral health is everybody’s business.”

“Over the last five years, many behavioral health partners and the legislature have studied and implemented many things to address this major crisis. The HSRI study is a major milestone that outlines the next steps all our key partners need to work on over the next five years,” said Rep. Kathy Hogan, who chairs the interim Human Services Committee.

To review the full report, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/mhlsa/2018-4-nd-behavioral-health-system-study-final-report-hsri.pdf.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services’ Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system in an effort to ensure health and safety, access to services and quality of services. The division is also responsible for establishing quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and providing policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information, visit www.behavioralhealth.dhs.nd.gov.

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