

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | April 1, 2020

Human Services implements legislative changes that expand addiction and recovery supports for North Dakotans

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services implemented two legislative changes today, April 1, that are part of the department’s behavioral health strategy focusing on getting services closer to home, increasing community-based services and expanding access to services for more people.

Lawmakers authorized changing the qualifying age for the substance use disorder voucher program from 18 to 14 years of age. This bill was introduced by Sen. David Clemens. Also, lawmakers approved allowing licensed opioid treatment programs to apply to open a medication unit to serve people in additional communities.

The voucher program was created in 2015 to address gaps in reimbursement for addiction services. Nearly 4,100 people have used the voucher program to receive services from private providers in the state. North Dakota has 22 substance use disorder voucher providers.

The voucher program provides reimbursement for services such as screenings, evaluations, individual therapy, outpatient or residential treatment, transportation and room and board.

“To complement the change in age eligibility, the legislature also approved state law changes to expand the voucher program provider pool to include local public health units and the tribes, which can increase access to vital addiction services,” said Pamela Sagness, director of the department’s Behavioral Health Division.

The other change involves North Dakota’s three licensed opioid treatment programs in Bismarck, Minot and Fargo. Each provides a form of medication assisted treatment for individuals with an opioid use disorder. These programs were authorized by the legislature in 2013 and began serving individuals in 2016.

The recent legislative change provides an opportunity for these opioid treatment programs to open a medication unit in a different community in an effort to increase access to services. A medication unit is a facility that is geographically separated from the home opioid treatment program.

Sagness said, “The majority of people getting their daily medication have to work or care for children and the long daily commutes can be a barrier. These medication units will reduce travel time for daily dosing and drug screens, though they wouldn’t provide the full range of services available at the opioid treatment clinic.”

-MORE-

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Page 2

To learn more about the substance use disorder voucher program and licensed opioid treatment programs in the state, visit www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov.

The department's Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety, access to services and quality services. It also establishes quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities.

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