

Mental Health is defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as “inclusive of emotional, psychological, and social aspects of well-being” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Service [HHS], 2020). Mental health and mental illness exist on a continuum, with a wide variety of classifications (examples include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder), duration (short- to long-term), and severity (mild to severe). In 2018, 19.1%, or 47.6 million, of the adult population in the U.S. reported having some degree of mental illness during the past year. Of those, 4.6%, or 11.4 million, reported having a serious mental illness (NAMI, n.d.). Major depressive disorder was one of the most common mental disorders in the U.S. In 2017, an estimated 17.3 million people reported having at least one major depressive episode (MDE), and 11 million adults reported having an MDE with severe impairment in 2017 (National Institute of Mental Health, 2019).

Mental illness also affects children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes mental disorders among children as “serious changes in the ways children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions” (CDC, 2020). The CDC reported 13-20% of children living in the U.S. experience a mental disorder each year. The healthcare costs amount to an estimated \$247 billion annually to treat childhood mental disorders. In 2017, approximately 3.2 million children aged 12-17 had at least one major depressive episode and, of those, 2.3 million presented with severe impairment which is defined as “the highest

severity level of role impairment across four domains: (1) chores at home, (2) school or work, (3) close relationships with family, and (4) social life” (SAMHSA, 2018a, p.A-37; 2018c).

CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Mental health issues are thought to be caused by multiple factors including biological, environmental, negative life experiences, and brain chemistry. Biological factors include genetics, infections, brain defects, prenatal damage, poor nutrition and exposure to environmental toxins such as lead (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Gender is a major biological factor; it is well documented that women are more likely than men to have any mental illness (22.3% versus 15.1% respectively in 2017), although men are more likely than women to have co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder (3.8% versus 3.1% respectively in 2017) (SAMHSA, 2018b).

Severe psychological trauma such as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse contributes significantly to mental illness. The prevalence of childhood sexual and physical abuse among persons with severe mental illness (SMI) is disturbingly high. Among women with SMI, 43-52% report a history of childhood sexual abuse and 33-52% report a history of childhood physical abuse. Of men with SMI, 29-36% reported childhood sexual abuse and 38-59% reported childhood physical abuse (Meade, Kershaw, Hansen, and Sikkema, 2009). Social and environmental triggers that can lead to mental illness include death of a loved one, divorce, dysfunctional family life, low self-esteem and

other feelings of inadequacy, and social or cultural expectations (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

TREATMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Timely treatment of mental health issues contributes to improved life expectancy. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reported that “adults in the U.S. living with serious mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than others, largely due to treatable medical conditions” (NAMI, n.d.). The primary treatment for mental illness is counseling. The scope of services provided by mental health counselors includes:

- Assessment and diagnosis
- Psychotherapy and group therapy
- Treatment planning and review
- Brief and solution-focused therapy
- Complementary health approaches
- Mental health medications
- Substance abuse treatment
- Education and prevention programs
- Crisis interventions

(NAMI, 2020)

Professionals in the mental health field (counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and therapists) receive licenses, certifications, and/or degrees to provide mental health counseling services. Mental health professionals often treat a spectrum of issues using a variety of treatments, but many also choose to specialize in fields such as loss (grief counseling), substance abuse, school and community issues, marriage and family issues, children’s issues, and geriatric therapy (NAMI, 2020).

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Research indicates that the availability, utilization, and quality of mental health services in the United States are particularly disproportionate among minority and low-income people and rural versus urban areas. There is lower utilization of services among African American and Hispanic children compared with white children, while white children in rural areas are less likely to receive services than white children in urban areas (Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, & Lewin, 2017).

Children living in poverty are likely to develop mental health issues due to environmental factors (e.g. exposure to crime, violence, drugs) and poor parenting due to familial stressors (e.g. food insecurity, housing problems). Yet, less than 15% receive services (Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, & Lewin, 2017). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), “75% to 80% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them” (NCCP, 2020).

Furthermore, minority children who are covered by Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are less likely to receive specialty health care than white children covered by the same plans (Kenny, Coyer, & Anderson, 2013).

THE MENTAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN TEXAS

With the immense range of needs for mental health counseling, a tiered system of therapy and support services currently exists in Texas. The Texas Health and Human Services Department (TxHHS) oversees all mental health services in the state of Texas, runs the state hospitals, and contracts with providers for community-based services (TxHHS, n.d.a). Its impact is far-reaching: in FY 2017 (most recent data available), 117,792 adults and 30,064 children received community mental health services from the Texas Human and Health Services Commission (HHSC) (The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 2018).

State Hospitals

There are ten state hospitals in Texas, one of which is located in San Antonio: San Antonio State Hospital (TxHHS, n.d.b). These facilities provide inpatient hospitalization for people dealing with severe mental illness and who need intense long- and short-term counseling.

Community Mental Health Centers

Community mental health centers, also known as Local Mental Health Authorities, are geographically based, providing services to specific geographic locations in Texas, are publicly funded, and serve adults diagnosed with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder as well as children diagnosed with serious emotional disturbances.

In 2019, Texas has 107 community mental health centers (SAMHSA, 2019b).

The Hill Country MHDD serves as the local mental health authority for Bandera, Comal, and Kendall counties, as well as sixteen other South Texas counties. Care for each patient is provided using a Disease Management Model that “focuses on an individual’s outcomes, selected services, tools, and strengths in order for them to recover” (Hill Country MHDD Centers, n.d.).

The Center for Health Care Services (n.d.) serves as the local mental health authority for Bexar County. Its four clinics throughout the city provide services including psychiatric evaluation, medication management, rehabilitation services, intensive case management, counseling, group therapy, family support, and more.

Other Mental Health Agencies

In the San Antonio area, a wide variety of other hospitals, university-based programs, nonprofit agencies, and religious institutions serve as an additional mental health safety net by providing services for those experiencing mental health issues. A listing of many of those programs is provided below.

Hospitals providing mental health services:

- Baptist Health System (adult inpatient psychiatric program)
- CentroMed (various locations; outpatient)
- Clarity Child Guidance Center (acute care program, residential treatment program, hospital program, outpatient services, psychology services for children and adolescents; sliding scale)
- CHRISTUS Santa Rosa: Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health (outpatient); Senior Behavioral Health Center (inpatient)
- Laurel Ridge Treatment Center (252 beds-provides acute, residential, and partial hospitalization)
- Methodist Health Care (inpatient and outpatient)
- Nix Specialty Health Center (acute care program, inpatient and outpatient, serving all ages)
- University Health System (emergency

psychiatric care, inpatient and outpatient)

Universities providing mental health services:

- Our Lady of the Lake University
- St. Mary’s University Family Life Center
- University of Texas at San Antonio

Nonprofit/religious counseling programs:

- Baptist Child Family Services (BCFS) (n.d.) – STAR Program youth ages 0-17 and their families (free)
- Catholic Charities (individual, couples, and family counseling; sliding scale)
- Center for Health Care Services (crisis and outpatient services)
- Children’s Bereavement Center provides outpatient mental health counseling and therapy for children who have experienced a loss (sliding scale)
- ChildSafe (Alamo Area Child Advocacy Center) provides counseling to children and non-offending family members dealing with sexual abuse (Medicaid, sliding scale)
- Communicare Health Centers (various locations; (Medicaid, sliding scale)
- Daughters of Charity (various locations; free)
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (group therapy; free)
- Ecumenical Center for Religion and Health (sliding scale)
- Excel Rise Above the Rest (youth & their families; Medicaid recipients)
- Family Endeavors, Inc. (military family clinic providing comprehensive mental health care to veterans; free)
- Family Services (n.d.) (counseling)
- Family Violence Prevention Services (includes specialized services for battered women)
- Gifts from Within (specializing in PTSD treatment)
- Haven for Hope (counseling services provided by Center for Health Care Services; children’s mental health care provided by Clarity Child Guidance Center)
- JOVEN (services for youth; free)
- Jewish Family Service (counseling; low cost or at no charge)
- Madonna Neighborhood Center (individual and group counseling; free)
- Methodist Healthcare Ministries (various

- locations; sliding scale)
- Presa Community Center (counseling; sliding scale)
- Rape Crisis Center (counseling; sliding scale)
- SLEW Cancer Wellness Center (counseling and support for disadvantaged women recovering from cancer; free)
- South Texas Veterans Health Care System (outpatient services for veterans)
- St. PJ’s Children’s Home (counseling and services for youth & families; sliding scale) (Network of Care, 2020)

INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE SERVICES

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) initiated the Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grants (MHTSIG) program in 2005, where it awarded grants totaling more than \$100 million to nine states over a five-year period to be used to improve public mental health services (Leff, Cichocki, Chow, and Lupton, 2014). Texas, one of the nine states, “was charged with building a solid foundation for delivering evidence-based mental health and related services, fostering recovery, [and] improving quality of life” (The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, n.d.). In a program evaluation, Leff, Cichocki, Chow, and Lupton (2014) concluded that the program did not “take into account evidence that infrastructure changes alone do not necessarily contribute to better consumer outcomes.”

Despite the grant’s conclusion, advancements have been made in the area of evidence-based practices (EBP) in Texas as shown in the following table:

Received Evidence-Based Practices, FY 2017		
	Penetration Rate: % of Consumers	
	Texas	U.S.
Adult EBP Services		
Supported Housing	3.7%	3.1%
Supported Employment	3.7%	2.0%
Assertive Community Treatment	2.4%	1.9%
Dual Diagnosis Treatment	4.7%	10.4%
Illness Self-Management	56.8%	18.9%
Medication Management	44.5%	31.3%
Child/Adolescent EBP Services		
Multi-Systemic Therapy	-	4.2%

(SAMHSA, 2019a)

Furthermore, many of the infrastructure changes have proven successful. Core accomplishments such as Via Hope, a key component of the infrastructure developed by MHTSIG, demonstrate progress. Via Hope aims to transform “the Texas mental health system into one that fosters resilience, promotes recovery, is person-centered, and is person, family, and youth-driven” (Via Hope, 2020).

Texas’ Legislature in its 2015 Regular Session authorized the establishment of the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC) “as the state mental health planning council” to submit “stakeholder recommendations... regarding the allocation and adequacy of mental health and substance use services and programs” (Texas Behavioral Health Advisory Committee [BHAC], 2017, p.3). BHAC made recommendations centering around personnel (e.g. develop a plan to increase and improve mental health/substance use workforce; and increase officer mental health training) and psychological evaluations (BHAC, 2017).

Despite these steps forward and an increase in state funding for behavioral health services in 2017, Texas still nationally ranks among the lowest for mental health spending and mental health care accessibility (Leonard, Cawthon, & Ezzone, 2017). However, local benefits are on the horizon: The HHSC is awarding \$45 million to 53 entities over two years. There are six entities in San Antonio that are included in this award. (TxHHS, 2020).

The Bexar County Community Health Collaborative and City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District published a Community Health Improvement Plan for Bexar County that included five goals, one of which was to improve behavioral and mental well-being. The plan identifies key strategies to accomplish this:

- Promote building blocks for a community wide system of care
- Create a community wide awareness and education plan
- Facilitate telemedicine for behavioral health in Bexar County, including mental health and substance-related disorders in primary care

settings

- Increase interest in behavioral health training and careers across professions (City of San Antonio [COSA], 2017)

“This plan has little value if it is not executed. It is the community’s responsibility to implement the actions and strategies set forth in this plan, to monitor and report on the progress made on a regular basis, and to use the next three years as an opportunity to positively impact the health status of Bexar County residents” (COSA, 2017, p.5).

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

Bexar County has the fifth highest COVID case count in Texas, currently reporting 54,180 (TxHHS) (n.d.c). The result of the high rate of positive cases to the community is a loss of employment, access to housing due to loss of income, loss of health care coverage, higher risk of depression, additional mental stress dealing with the unexpected loss of a loved one (Price, 2020). Price (2020) goes on to explain that it will take months if not years to have a clear understanding of just how hard the pandemic will hit the community.

The hospitals discussed previously in this brief continue to offer services to the community to combat the growing number of people who are facing mental health issues due to COVID-19. These services were adjusted to ensure they follow the guidelines of the CDC which include social distancing, wearing of face coverings, not allowing family members into the facility unless medically necessary. In addition, patients now have access to virtual appointments that allow providers to provide counseling and treatment to patients who are unable to attend appointments face to face (Network of Care, 2020).

REFERENCES

Baptist Child Family Services (BCFS). (n.d.) *Services to at risk youth (STAR)*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://discoverbcfs.net/services/youth-and-teens/star/>

Center for Health Care Services. (n.d.). *Mental health services*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://chcsbc.org/get-help/mental-health-services/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2020). *What are childhood mental disorders?* Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/basics.html>

City of San Antonio (COSA). (2017). 2017 Healthy Bexar plan: Community health improvement plan. Retrieved from <https://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/health/News/Reports/CHIP-2017.pdf>

Family Services Association. (n.d.). *Home*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://family-service.org/>

Hill Country MHDD Centers. (n.d.). *Mental health (adults & children)*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://www.hillcountry.org/mental-behavioral-health/>

Hodgkinson S., Godoy L., Beers L.S., & Lewin A. (2017). *Improving mental health access for low-income children and families in the primary care setting*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5192088/>

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. (n.d.). *Training and certification for peer specialists*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <http://hogg.utexas.edu/initiatives/via-hope>

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. (2018). *Public behavioral health services in Texas*. Retrieved from <http://hogg.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Public-Behavioral-Health-Services-in-Texas.pdf>

Kenny, G., Coyer C., and Anderson, N. (2013). *Racial and ethnic differences in access to care and service use for children with coverage through Medicaid and the children’s health insurance program*. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412780-Racial-and-Ethnic-Differences-in-Access-to-Care-and-Service-Use-for-Children-Summary.pdf?RSSFeed=UI_Health/Healthcare.xml

Leff, S., Chichocki, B., Chow, CM., & Lupton, C. (2014). Infrastructure change is not enough: An evaluation of SAMHSA’s mental health transformation state incentive grants. Retrieved from <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/pdf/10.1176/appi.ps.201300324>

Leonard, M., Cawthon, W., Ezzone, Z. (2017). *Texas falls short on mental health access, spending*. Retrieved from <https://namigreaterhouston.org/texas-falls-short-mental-health-access-spending/>

Mayo Clinic. (2020). *Mental illness: Symptoms & causes*. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968>

Meade, C., Kershaw, T., Hansen, N., and Sikkema, K. (2009). Long-term correlates of childhood abuse among adults with severe mental illness: Adult victimization, substance abuse, and HIV sexual risk behavior. *AIDS Behavior*, 13(207). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-007-9326-4>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). (n.d.). *Mental health by the numbers*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). (2020). *Types of mental health professionals*. Retrieved from <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Types-of-Mental-Health-Professionals>

National Center for Children in Poverty. (NCCP). (2020). *Children’s mental health*. Retrieved from <https://www.nccp.org/publication/childrens-mental-health-what-every-policymaker-should-know/>

National Institute of Mental Health. (2019). *Major depression*. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtm>

Network of Care. (2020). *Find services*. Retrieved from <http://bexar.tx.networkofcare.org/aging/services/index.aspx>

- Price, S. (2020) *Pandemic Pressures: COVID-19 Poses Serious Behavioral Health Challenges*. Retrieved from <https://www.texmed.org/Template.aspx?id=54816>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2018a). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2017 national survey on drug use and health*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHFRR2017/NSDUHFRR2017.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2018b). *Results from the 2017 national survey on drug use and health: Detailed tables*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2019a). *Texas 2019 mental health outcome measures (NOMS): SAMHSA uniform reporting system*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt27977/Texas%202019%20URS%20Output%20Tables/Texas%202019%20URS%20Output%20Tables.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2019b). *National mental health services survey (n-MHSS): 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt29388/NMHSS-2019/NMHSS-2019.pdf>
- Texas Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC). (2017). *Behavioral health advisory committee 2017 legislative recommendations*. Retrieved from <https://hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/about-hhs/leadership/advisory-committees/bhac/ACCESSIBLE-agenda-item-11-BHAC-2017-recommendations.pdf>
- Texas Health and Human Services (TxHHS, 2020). *HHSC Awards \$45 Million for Community Mental Health Services*. Retrieved from <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/communications-events/news/2020/09/hhsc-awards-45-million-community-mental-health-services>
- Texas Health and Human Services (TxHHS). (n.d.a). *Mental health & substance use*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use>
- Texas Health and Human Services (TxHHS). (n.d.b). *State hospitals*. Retrieved November 11, 2020, from <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/state-hospitals>
- Texas Health and Human Services (TxHHS) (n.d.c). *Coronavirus Disease 2019, Case Count*. Retrieved on November 11, 2020 from https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/?gclid=Cj0KCQIAhZT9BRDmARIsAN2E-J1pcrRWUTeLfiAueoOXYtV98Zz2VoYl1qAF8sTv49ejkWfkzY3FAtUaAj9uEALw_wcB
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). (2020). *What is mental health?* Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>
- Via Hope. (2020). *What we do*. Retrieved from <https://www.viahope.org/programs/>