

# Mental health center seeks more county funds as dynamics change

## Four County Mental Health Center retools its method to become all-encompassing of client health needs, director tells county commission

BY ANDY TAYLOR  
chronicle@taylornews.org

INDEPENDENCE — A new approach toward the delivery of mental health services is prompting Four County Mental Health Center to seek more taxpayer funds as the center retools its programming.

At Monday's Montgomery County Commission, Four County Mental Health Center executive director Greg Hennen presented the center's annual request for taxpayer funds. As Montgomery County's community-based mental health service, Four County receives a fraction of 1.0 mill from the county's annual budget as a subsidy for impoverished or uninsured persons who seek mental health services. For the 2021 budget year, Montgomery County was appropriated less than one quarter of 1.0 mill, which translates to slightly more than \$78,500 in taxpayer funds.

While the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and into 2021 has lessened the volume of patients who seek mental health services locally, Four County has experienced an uptick in patient needs in the past three months, he said. The challenges and stresses from the pandemic are now being felt among all cross sections of the population, he said.

In 2020, Four County provided mental health care to 2,809 residents in Montgomery County. Of those patients, 50 percent — or roughly 1,400 people — required psychiatric-level care. Of the those people seeking psychiatric care, about 28 percent — or about 400 people — required some form of urgent or crisis intervention services, Hennen said.

"The need for subsidized outpatient therapy and psychiatric medical care for calendar year 2020 greatly

exceeded the present allocation of \$78,500," he said. "That need alone in 2020 was \$234,589."

As one of the top 20 largest counties in Kansas, Montgomery County ranks 102nd out of 105 counties in per capita spending for mental health services. Montgomery County expends \$2.36 per capita on behavioral health, he said.

Hennen recommended that Montgomery County increase its share of its annual fund allocation to \$180,000. If Montgomery County was able to raise its level of commitment to mental health services, then Montgomery County's per capita spending would raise the county to 74th overall.

"This would help cover the gap of the subsidized fees that are providing for those who cannot afford mental health services," he said.

Hennen said Four County was looking at a unique approach toward mental health delivery in the coming years. Called Certified Community Behavioral Health Care, or CCBHC, the approach looks at an all-encompassing delivery of medical care to a mental health patient or client, he said. CCBHC will continue the comprehensive behavioral health screenings but also incorporate primary health screenings (such as height, weight, blood pressure) while also providing primary health resources and referral.

"CCBHC will take a thorough, 'whole person' approach toward patient care," he said. "It involves not only the behavioral health issues but also a person's primary medical care."

Four County was one of 90 community mental health services in the country to receive a federal grant to study the CCBHC approach. That \$2 million grant from the

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, will go toward the redeveloped and retooled approach of mental health delivery through CCBHC, Hennen said. Grant funds, which will be expended in 2021 and 2022, cannot be used to supplant lost income of existing programs, he said.

Recent legislation passed by the Kansas Legislature and signed into law will require more community-based mental health centers like Four County to gear their programming and services

CCBHC was specifically designed to address the challenges of suicide, opioid overdoses, delayed health care caused by stressed or overburdened systems, inadequate care for military veterans, overburdened jails and emergency departments. toward CCBHC, Hennen said.

"The intent of CCBHC is to improve the quality of life for those in a particular county while also reducing the costs and burdens to the overall healthcare system and also law enforcement and corrections," he emphasized.

Several surrounding states, including Missouri and Oklahoma, have already advanced their mental health services toward CCBHC. As a result, those states have experienced reductions in hospitalizations and emergency room visits, as well as improved cost savings through reductions in crisis interventions.

Additionally, more military veterans in those states are receiving medical and/or mental health care through CCBHC, thereby reducing suicide threats that are triggered by high rates of post-traumatic stress disorders, he said.

On a related note, Hennen asked commissioners to continue allocating one third of the county's share of liquor tax funds to Four County Mental Health Center for its alcohol and drug-related programs. Under state law, one third of sales tax funds derived from liquor by the drink are devoted to local alcohol and drug-related programs.

In 2020, Four County provided alcohol and drug services to 454 people residing in Montgomery County.

County commissioners said they would take Hennen's funding requests under advisement.