A Study of Integration of Primary Care and Behavioral Health in New Hampshire

Numerous New Hampshire studies, commissions, and plans have highlighted a lack of access to community-based mental health and substance use treatment, fragmented and poorly coordinated systems of care, as well as higher health care costs for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders. The bottom line is that the failure of our health care system to adequately address behavioral health needs comes at a devastating cost to individuals, families, and our larger community. This has been documented with alarming statistics.

Earlier this year, the Endowment for Health commissioned an independent study to provide a snapshot of New Hampshire’s behavioral health and primary care integration models. A multidisciplinary group of New Hampshire stakeholders informed the study design. Cherokee Health Systems was chosen, through a competitive process, to conduct the study. Cherokee Health Systems is a national leader in, and a practitioner of, behavioral health and primary care integration.

The study includes a robust body of national data that supports the efficacy of integrated care models. It analyzes integrated behavioral health and primary care models in various practice settings and includes an assessment of the state’s current policy and financing environment. Using a tested and standardized assessment tool, the study reveals “pockets of innovation” across the state. A number of these innovative models are highlighted and provide examples to learn from and build upon. Yet, the study also underscores the fact that New Hampshire has yet to create models of fully integrated practice.

Among key findings, the study emphasizes that leadership is a key ingredient – at the state, system and practice level. Innovative practices highlighted in the report and elsewhere have benefited greatly from strong organizational and system leadership. Similarly at the state level, a number of new initiatives are described that demonstrate leadership and a commitment to address the unmet behavioral health needs of New Hampshire’s people. As a State we are poised to build on this leadership through continued dialogue, better coordination, and communication.

Importantly, the study offers specific, actionable recommendations to effectively advance toward full behavioral health and primary care integration in New Hampshire.

We hope that the study will serve as a baseline for providers, payers, government officials and others as we work together to create an evolutionary pathway to a more effective and efficient health care system – one that treats behavioral health as an essential part of overall health. We also hope the study serves as a catalyst to continue to foster leadership, to spark debate, and to provide needed attention to the unmet behavioral health needs of New Hampshire’s people. The Endowment for Health looks forward to being a part of that dialogue.

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