Delaware Partnership Yields New Mental Health Service

An ongoing partnership between the Delaware State Office of Rural Health (DE SORH) and the Delaware Rural Health Initiative (DRHI), which serves as the state rural health association, has helped forge new ways of helping the mentally ill and those experiencing psychiatric crises in rural areas of the state.

The partnership has evolved over time with the support of DE SORH funding, according to Kathy Collison, director of the DE SORH. The DE SORH and DRHI collaborate on an annual rural health conference that focuses on issues that affect access to health care for rural Delawareans. For the last several years, the conferences have focused on mental health. “As a result of networking and bridge building at the rural health conferences, a mental health leadership team was established to look at the rural mental health system,” Collison said. “That team has identified and addressed problems with infrastructure in rural Delaware.”

They found that individuals presenting at emergency departments in rural Delaware were often transported to inpatient facilities in urban areas, and Delaware law required the use of a police officer for that transport. “In addition to facing a mental health or psychiatric crisis, the individual would also face the trauma of being put in handcuffs and placed in a police vehicle,” Collison said. “And police indicated that thousands of dollars were being spent simply to transport people to inpatient facilities.”

One result of the team’s work was the opening of a non-inpatient facility in southern Delaware in August 2012. The Crisis and Psychiatric Assessment Center/Recovery Response Center, funded by the Delaware Department of Health and Human Services, is a 23-hour crisis assessment and engagement program for individuals 18 years and older who have significant mental health and/or substance use challenges. The goal of the Center's services is to divert patients from hospitalization and higher levels of care by rapidly getting to know their needs, engage them in a voluntary recovery opportunity, and connect them to community services and supports. A nurse practitioner is either on-site or on-call 24/7 and works under the supervision of a medical director. Additional 24/7 staff includes mental health professionals, psychiatric nurses and peer support specialists.

“Our SORH funding supported conferences and partnerships that allowed this issue to come to light,” Collison said. “We are pleased to have stimulated this critical dialogue and subsequent investments in infrastructure,” said Paul Lakeman, DRHI President. Lakeman said.

For more information on this partnership and the Delaware mental health facility, please contact Kathy Collison at Katherine.Collison@state.de.us.