



# Texas System of Care *Achieving Well-Being for Children and Youth*



## **Fewer than one-third of Texas children and youth receive the mental health services they need.<sup>1</sup>**

Roughly ten percent, or an estimated 4.5 to 6.3 million, of children and youth in the United States experience a serious mental health condition<sup>2</sup> and 20 percent have a diagnosable mental disorder.<sup>3</sup> All too frequently, they do not get the help they need. In fact, approximately 65 to 80 percent of these children do not receive mental health treatment due to expense, stigma or the inaccessibility of appropriate services and supports.<sup>4</sup>

Without proper treatment, children and youth with mental health concerns can experience a variety of problems including school failure, trouble with the law and suicide. The long-term outcomes can be life-changing, such as increased risk of dropping out of school, unemployment, substance abuse, early pregnancy and being arrested or homeless. The expense to Texas is compounded when children and youth must be placed in high cost, intensive settings, such as hospitals, residential treatment centers and juvenile correctional settings.

But mental health treatment can improve the outcomes for children, youth and families. For children with serious mental health concerns, a comprehensive and coordinated network of services and supports is needed to meet these challenges.

## **A Proven Solution: System of Care**

Fortunately, an effective solution exists. Called system of care, the approach recognizes the importance of collaboration between child and youth-serving systems, such as child welfare, juvenile justice, education and mental health. Under a system of care framework, these organizations work collaboratively with a shared vision for their community. But it doesn't stop there. The approach brings everyone involved in the child or youth's life together to develop an individualized plan of care.

The system of care framework is family-driven and youth-guided, and the child or youth and their family are always at the center of planning and decision-making. Strong support teams are formed that can include parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, neighbors, religious leaders or others who are connected and might help. This team focuses on the child and family's strengths, not weaknesses, as they craft a single plan of care, accessing the unique array of community-based supports and services the family needs.

Communities implementing the system of care approach share key values that guide their work, ensuring that systems are family-driven and youth-guided, culturally-competent and have a focus on keeping children and youth in their communities.

## **Undeniable Results**

When a system of care approach is implemented and sustained, research and evaluation results show that children, youth and families experience both short and long-term benefits. For the children and youth, these can include improvements in school attendance and performance, decreased interactions with law enforcement, reduced reliance on inpatient mental health care and a reduction in suicide attempts.<sup>5</sup> And, by providing needed resources and the right approach, system of care reduces the strain and stress placed on families and helps keep children in their communities.<sup>5</sup>

### **SYSTEM OF CARE DEFINED**

A system of care is an organizational philosophy and framework that is designed to create a network of effective community-based services and supports to improve the lives of children and youth with or at risk of serious mental health conditions. Systems of care build meaningful partnerships with families and youth, address cultural and linguistic needs and use evidence-based practices to help children, youth and families function better at home, in school, in the community and throughout life.

## A TEXAS SYSTEM OF CARE

The goal in Texas is to use system of care statewide as an approach to plan and deliver services and supports to children and youth with serious mental health concerns, as well as their families. And it's already working in communities across the state, both urban and rural, from the Rural Children's Initiative in northwest Texas, to Ft. Worth and its surrounding counties, to Houston, to the far west edge of the state in El Paso and to Central Texas. The objective is to spread system of care practice to more Texas children and youth in need — providing them with access to a coordinated, effective service delivery system.

That's what Texas System of Care is all about. Partners are coming together across the state to identify ways to help local communities address the needs of children and youth with serious mental health concerns using a system of care approach.

Texas System of Care will create a system of care roadmap for the state by:

- ✓ Building upon existing community assets and supporting communities interested in improving outcomes and costs through a system of care framework.
- ✓ Identifying and strengthening policies and practices to support a strong system of care infrastructure.
- ✓ Establishing select community system of care projects to inform long-range planning and aid in a statewide rollout.
- ✓ Strengthening service delivery systems to children and families.
- ✓ Providing services that are culturally-informed.
- ✓ Increasing family and youth voice in decision making at all levels.
- ✓ Providing statewide training in system of care values, principles and best practices.
- ✓ Building awareness and a strong voice for children's mental health in Texas.

## A Shared Vision for Texas

### Vision

All Texas children and youth have access to high quality mental health care that is family-driven, youth-guided, community-based, culturally-grounded and sustainable.

### Mission

To strengthen the collaboration of state and local efforts to weave mental health supports and services into seamless systems of care for children, youth and their families.

## Partners

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (lead agency)  
Family and Youth Representatives  
Hogg Foundation for Mental Health  
Texans Care for Children  
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
Texas Education Agency  
Texas Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
Texas Juvenile Justice Department  
The University of Texas at Austin, Center for Social Work Research  
Via Hope  
Texas System of Care Communities  
Texas ASSET Expansion Communities

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of State Health Services (2011). *Mental Health and Substance Abuse 2012-2013 Block Grant Plan*.

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services. (2003). *Children & Families, Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program*. SAMHSA Portfolio of Programs and Activities.

<sup>3</sup> Costello, E. J., Angold, A., Bums, B. J., Erkanli, A., Strangl, D. K., & Tweed, D. L. (1996). *The Great Smoky Mountains study of youth: Functional impairment and serious emotional disturbance*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 53, 1137-1143.

<sup>4</sup> President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). *Subcommittee on Children and Families Summary Report*. U.S. Public Health Service. (2000). *Report of the Surgeon General conference on children's mental health: A national action agenda*. Washington DC: Author.

<sup>5</sup> Stroul, B. A., & Blau, G. M. (2008). *The system of care handbook: Transforming mental health services for children, youth, and families*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes Publishing.