

# FINDING A SOLUTION, TOGETHER.

## 2023 POLICY PRIORITIES

MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION



— Mental Health and —  
Substance Abuse Coalition

# VALUES

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**ACT IN THE BEST INTEREST  
OF THE COMMUNITY**

**PATIENT-CENTRIC**

**TRANSPARENT**

**RESPECT EACH OTHER  
& THE PROCESS**

**SERVE PEOPLE OF ALL  
AGES IN CRISIS**

# ABOUT

The Mental Health & Substance Abuse Coalition is a collection of passionate partners who want a better future for the community.



## VISION:

Create a community where people in crisis find a place of hope and a path to health.



## MISSION:

Develop a sustainable, accessible and integrated system of care that serves people with mental health and substance abuse disorders who are in crisis, in order to efficiently and effectively deliver services that create positive outcomes.

# GOALS



## ACCESS TO CARE:

To reduce barriers so patients can get to services they need when they need them.



## COORDINATION, COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION:

To create a system of care that relies on improved communication, coordination and collaboration among service providers.



## WORKFORCE:

To have enough employees to meet demand in mental health, substance abuse, social work and other behavioral health professions.

# BOARD MEMBERS

- Robyn Chadwick, Ascension Via Christi Hospital, *President*
- Joan Tammany, COMCARE, *Vice President*
- Jeff Easter, Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office, *Secretary*
- Harold Casey, SACK, *Treasurer*
- Gary Schmitt, INTRUST Bank, *Compliance Officer*
- Marc Bennett, Office of the District Attorney 18th Judicial District
- Steve Dixon, P.B. Hoidale Co, Inc.
- Todd Johnson, Wichita Crime Commission
- Richard Kerschen, The Law Company Inc.
- Maria Kury, USD 259
- Terri Moses, USD 259
- Deann Smith, United Methodist Open Door
- LaTasha St. Arnault, HumanKind Ministries
- Michelle Vann, Vanntastic Solutions
- Maggie Ballard, Wichita City Council, *Ex-Officio*
- David Dennis, Sedgwick County Commission, *Ex-Officio*
- Secretary Laura Howard, Kansas Department for Aging & Disability, *Ex-Officio*
- Becky Tuttle, Wichita City Council, *Ex-Officio*

# 2023 POLICY PRIORITIES

## 1 Assist and support the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition to develop a stronger workforce pipeline, attract new workforce, and support current behavioral healthcare staff

### What

- A.** Reduce barriers to reciprocity for licensed behavioral health care workers with appropriate credentials who are relocating to Kansas
- B.** Include retired licensed mental/behavioral health employees in the KPERs exemption of penalty list as rehires
- C.** Use the SPARK Grant funding resources to retain behavioral health care workers by focusing on understanding workforce needs:
  - Study behavioral health trends to address core and/or high utilized services.
  - Provide educational support such as time off for continuing education, scholarships, and tuition reimbursement.
  - Implement a program to serve mental health care needs and build resiliency among mental/behavioral health care workers.
- D.** Establish and support efforts to create a workforce/employer incentive program for mental/behavioral health care workers (like the Kansas Aviation Tax Credit program)
  - Ease the barriers for nonprofit agencies to process and obtain tax credits
    - Research and data can identify barriers within the process that promote opportunities for agencies, making the tax credit program beneficial for nonprofit organizations
    - The Public Policy and Management Center at Wichita State University has previously provided useful data and research to support the Coalition's work in the community

### Why

The shortage of qualified behavioral health professionals in the Wichita area is at a crisis level. COMCARE, our local Community Mental Health Center managed by Sedgwick County, currently has over 180 staff openings. Ascension Via Christi hospital currently lacks 30 percent of needed behavioral health social workers. Little incentive to pursue a career in behavioral health, plus low pay and burnout due to high caseloads, has led to severe staffing shortages.

## 2 Build a Regional Mental Health Hospital in the Wichita Region

Build a regional mental health hospital in the Wichita region to support community members in crisis and minimize the wait time for those seeking/needing services

### Why

As the largest county user of the Osawatimie State Hospital, Sedgwick County and south-central Kansas is in significant need of a regional mental health hospital. Ensuring access to care in proximity to the resources and the population base allows for Sedgwick County resources to be leveraged more efficiently. In addition, a regional hospital addresses the continuum of care needed in the area.

# 3 Increase the Medicaid Rate for all In-Patient and Out-Patient Behavioral Health Services by 10 percent

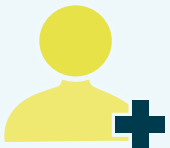
Address the cost of providing services

Why

In 2022, a four percent Medicaid increase was approved to assist with the reimbursement rate. This was the first increase in the past 13 years. Additional resources are needed to allow providers to recover the cost of providing services. Providers struggle to attract and retain workforce because they cannot provide competitive wages at the current reimbursement rate. Eligible providers are rapidly leaving Kansas for higher pay and lower patient and caseload sizes. Fewer providers lead to less access to care with higher cost in emergency services.

# 4 Increase Inpatient Beds for Substance Abuse Treatment

Why



**A.** Increase funding for substance abuse treatment providers to allow for increased inpatient beds available.



**B.** Permanently change the ratio of twelve clients per each substance abuse clinician.

In 2022, KDADS modified the client to clinician ratio to decrease wait times for clients approved for treatment. While the increase eased the wait times, there continues to be a 6-10 week wait for many to enter treatment. Increasing the state funding for treatment, and the increased ratio of clients to clinicians, will:

- Reduce the wait time for individuals entering treatment
- Support individuals who are ready for treatment
- Minimize the possibility of overdose while individuals are waiting to enter treatment

# 5 Identify, implement, and fund a Behavioral Health program to reduce the number of uninsured Kansans, particularly those living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level

Increase access to care for community members whose income range makes them ineligible for Medicaid insurance.

Why

Kansas is losing behavioral healthcare workers to surrounding states due to higher wages provided by Medicaid expansion. With an increase in Medicaid, behavioral health care agencies could offer more services, increase wages, and put dollars back into the Kansas economy.

# SUPPORTING ISSUES

1

## Continue Telemedicine Reimbursement Rate at the In-Person Rate Post-Pandemic

To respond to community needs, telemedicine reimbursement rates were adjusted to match in-person rates. With the increased use of telemedicine and the shortage of workforce, we request that the State continue to reimburse telemedicine using the same rate as in-person services after the “state of emergency” is over.

2

## Support Sustainable and Reliable Funding for SB 19 – 988 Suicide Hotline

Locate stable and sustainable funding for the 988 Suicide Hotline program adopted in Kansas last year with limited funding.

The 988 Suicide Hotline services help mitigate tragic suicide deaths, negative contacts with law enforcement, and homelessness. It also assists with the reducing the number of expensive revolving door solutions of ER visits, arrests, and incarceration. Between 2015 and 2020, one in four fatal police shootings involved a person with a mental illness (NAMI, 2021). In the Sedgwick County Jail, approximately 70 percent of all inmates have a substance use disorder and 35 percent have a diagnosed mental illness. KDADS will collect additional data to understand what support is needed in the future.

3

## Fully Fund Established Crisis Stabilization Centers

Crisis services across the state need funding to support community crisis needs. Advocacy is needed at both regional and state levels.

Crisis stabilization centers were initially funded by the State as part of a state-wide plan for continuum of care for people in crisis. However, funding to support crisis centers, like COMCARE, has not kept up with demand. We request an additional \$1.5 million for the crisis stabilization center in Wichita as part of the request for statewide funds of \$9.5 million.

4

## Support the Wichita State University and University of Kansas Biomedical School

The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition supports the Wichita State University and University of Kansas Biomedical School.

- Together, these schools will offer enhanced programming that will prioritize biomedical and health care in Wichita.
- The campus has received a \$35 million commitment from the Kansas Legislature. Wichita State University and the University of Kansas were both recently approved by the Kansas Board of Regents to request a \$10 million bond payment for the institutions to build the facility. More investment in health care means mental/behavioral health care workers will be attracted to, and stay in, Wichita.



— Mental Health and —  
Substance Abuse Coalition

In 2019, a group of leaders from law enforcement, health care, behavioral health programs, private businesses, education and local nonprofits formed the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition. It was the natural evolution of a group that had been working at the intersection of mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness issues in Wichita and the surrounding areas for several years.



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**PUBLIC POLICY & MANAGEMENT CENTER**

## **CONTACT**

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