Overview, Priorities, and Accomplishments of the Mental Health and Substance Use Alliance of Larimer County

Description

The Mental Health and Substance Use Alliance of Larimer County (MHSU Alliance) is a group of over 20 organizations and a number of consumers and family members working together to restructure our system of mental health and substance use services; significantly improving their responsiveness to the needs of those individuals most affected by mental illness and substance use related disorders in our community.

Vision

“A well-coordinated, well-funded continuum of mental health and substance use disorder services which will achieve our maximum potential for meeting community needs and promote a healthier community through healthier individuals and families.”

History

The MHSU Alliance (then called the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership) began evolving in 1999 because our community faced a crisis in being able to get appropriate mental health care to those who needed it when they needed it. Before long, the mission expanded to include substance use disorders due to the inter-relationship between the two disorders. Community member’s health was suffering from gaps in services, confusion about where to go, and long waiting lists. Community responders (law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services) and providers (hospital, health and human services agencies) also experienced confusion about where to send community members for help, as well as frustrations when appropriate services were not available. After an initial assessment of needs, the Partnership began planning in 2001, realizing that there would need to be multiple changes in our local system of services, and that related agencies, organizations and family and consumer advocates would need to work together to accomplish these changes and make them sustainable.

Structure

Over the years, hundreds of people have participated in helping the MHSU Alliance consider and make significant changes in our local system of care. Currently, this work is overseen by a Steering Committee, which includes consumers and family members working side-by-side with the CEOs or high-level administrators from health and human service organizations and hospitals, local school districts and higher education, law enforcement and criminal justice, housing and homelessness service providers, and city and county government. (See Appendix A for a list of members). The MHSU
Alliance also convenes a number of workgroups and provides liaisons who attend workgroups of related initiatives in the community. For more information on workgroups, see Appendix B).

The MHSU Alliance is an Unincorporated Non-Profit Association, and a Health Alliance, housed within the infrastructure of the Health District, where it is overseen by a Program Director and the Health District’s Executive Director, and staffed by Health District employees. The MHSU Alliance is funded by annual partner contributions, Health District funds, and grants.

Current MHSU Alliance Projects and Priorities

The MHSU Alliance Steering Committee identifies priority areas to focus the work of the MHSU Alliance. In general, these priorities fall into three key areas of impact: Awareness, Effectiveness and Capacity/Access (See Appendix C). Currently, MHSU Alliance members and staff are working with other partners and stakeholders in the community to support and facilitate the following new approaches and services:

Implementation of new behavioral health facility and services in Larimer County: After completing a study and report of service gaps in Larimer County that was used as a foundation for a successful 2018 ballot measure, the MHSU Alliance is now supporting the Larimer County Behavioral Health Services department related to the tax-funded development of a behavioral healthcare facility and services. For example, the MHSU Alliance provided financial support and staff time to help organize a one-day local “Summit” to provide foundational knowledge about behavioral health to members of the newly formed Policy Advisory Council (PAC) and Technical Advisory Council (TAC) who will direct the allocation of funds for “distributed community services” made available through new tax funds.

Improvements in approaches to substance use disorders: Transforming our community’s perceptions and treatment of addiction and substance use disorders through:

- **Advancing Behavioral Health Grant received by the MHSU Alliance:** Work with SummitStone Health Partners and the Alternative Sentencing and Probation Departments of Larimer County to assess current knowledge, skills attitudes and beliefs about substance use disorders; change organizational culture; create a process improvement plan; implement specific changes and improvements in policies and procedures; and ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to appropriately and effectively work with individuals with substance use disorders.

- **Changing Minds public awareness campaign** focused on substance use disorders. This campaign provides messaging; personal stories of recovery; training on brain science and addiction; information on using different non-stigmatizing language; and connection to resources in order to raise community awareness that addiction is a chronic brain disease, treatment works and recovery is possible. The campaign utilizes various platforms and strategies like community events, videos, social media, public installations of “brain pods” and others to reach audiences across the county. ([https://changingmindslarimer.org/](https://changingmindslarimer.org/))
- **Bringing Research to Practice:** A daylong professional and community training event was held with a national addiction treatment expert, Dr. Corey Waller, in May 2018. Since then, MHSU Alliance members and staff have worked to further disseminate information on the science of addiction through videos, visual summaries, and trainings. The MHSU Alliance is now providing training, technical assistance and support to specific sectors of the community (hospitals, emergency departments, physicians and behavioral healthcare providers) to identify necessary next steps for implementing Dr. Waller’s “ecosystem of treatment” for addiction.

- **Hub-and-Spoke implementation to improve MAT in Northern Colorado:** Through participation in the Northern Colorado Opioid Prevention Workgroup, the MHSU Alliance is providing assistance in implementing a “Hub-and-Spoke” model for Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) through the “Colorado Opioid Synergy Larimer and Weld (CO-SLAW) three year SAMHSA grant received by the North Colorado Health Alliance.

- **MAT and Naloxone in the Jail:** MHSU Alliance members and staff are supporting work of the North Colorado Opioid Prevention Workgroup to initiate programming within the Larimer County Jail to enable inmates to either begin or maintain MAT while incarcerated, and be connected to the “Hub-and-Spoke” model and other services upon release through a formal jail re-entry process. In addition, Naloxone will be provided upon release, in order to reduce the higher likelihood of overdose associated with release from jail for those with opioid use disorders.

- **Naloxone Education and Distribution:** The MHSU Alliance, North Colorado Health Alliance and the Colorado Health Network facilitate a “Naloxone Champions” workgroup that is educating northern Colorado about the importance of Narcan/Naloxone; ensuring that pharmacies are carrying and recommending it; training individuals and organizations to administer Naloxone; helping organizations purchase affordable Naloxone; and distributing Naloxone as needed.

**Frequent Utilizer Systems Engagement (FUSE) Demonstration Project:** MHSU Alliance members and staff are working with Homeward 2020 and other partners to initiate a Frequent Utilizer Systems Engagement (FUSE) demonstration project that will provide twenty chronically homeless frequent criminal justice service users with housing and intensive treatment and support services in order to reduce their utilization of high-cost acute and crisis services and improve their functioning and quality of life. This project may serve as a foundation for scaling up to a future “pay for success” project to fully implement the model in the community.

**Facilitating the promulgation of the Zero Suicide model** in healthcare organizations and systems throughout Larimer County. For example, in 2018, the MHSU Alliance worked with partners from the ImagineZero initiative to provide training to over 70 individuals. These individuals are currently using the training materials and skills to implement Zero Suicide within their organizations.
MHSU Alliance Accomplishments and Impact

MHSU Alliance Work has resulted in or helped facilitate the development of local best practice programs and services

Findings and recommendations of local studies, the recommendations of MHSU Alliance workgroups, and MHSU Alliance planning processes have helped the following programs and services be realized:

The Connections Mental Health & Substance Use Resources program was developed in partnership with the Health District and SummitStone Health Partners in 2002.

The Child, Adolescent and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) Team was developed in The Child, Adolescent and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) Team at Connections was developed in 2016 in response to priorities set by the Early Identification and Early Intervention (EIEI) Workgroup of the MHSU Alliance and in partnership with Poudre School District and SummitStone Health Partners.

The Crisis Assessment Center (CAC) at the Poudre Valley Hospital Emergency Department was developed in 2005 as a result of work of the Crisis Response Restructuring Committee of the MHSU Alliance.

The Community Dual Disorders Treatment (CDDT) Team, utilizing best practices for people with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders was developed in 2008 and is now integrated with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team through SummitStone Health Partners.

Integrated Care Teams were placed at Salud Health Clinic and Family Medicine Center through the Health District.

The Leap Coalition was formed as a result of priorities related to improving the socioemotional wellbeing of children ages 0-5 shared by the MHSU Alliance, Larimer County, the Early Childhood Council, schools and other partners. Leap is a robust coalition with numerous active workgroups working on screening, early childhood mental health, home visiting, integrated care and family strengthening related to young children.

The MHSU Alliance has convened stakeholders and facilitated development of solutions to critical system issues in Larimer County

Crisis System Problem Solving: The MHSU Alliance has been asked to convene and facilitate problem-solving processes between individuals and organizations involved in community behavioral health crisis response on several occasions.

- Uncooperative emergency commitment holds: Currently, MHSU Alliance members and staff are working with stakeholders (Emergency Departments, Jail, Law Enforcement etc.) to identify issues surrounding intoxicated individuals placed at the Emergency Departments on an
Emergency Commitment hold in order to develop sustainable solutions through updated policies and protocols.

- **Detox Transportation:** In 2005, sustainable transportation options were developed from Larimer County to the Detox facility located in Weld County through a “fair-share” funding agreement involving numerous stakeholders (and occasional updating of the “fair-share” funding calculations, and assistance in maintaining commitment to this strategy among partners). In 2012, when the County was considering eliminating their share of this funding, members of the MHSU Alliance came together to help Larimer County officials better understand the history and intent of this “fair-share” funding agreement, and successfully advocated for the County to maintain their portion of this funding.

- **Crisis Decision Support:** A “Crisis Consistency Matrix” decision-support tool was developed and maintained for many years to help first contacts and responders know how to assess a behavioral health crisis situation and determine the best place to take the person in crisis for care.

**The MHSU Alliance has encouraged and supported professional development and community training related to behavioral health**

As a result of MHSU Alliance interests in ensuring state-of-the-art, effective services, and ensuring community awareness of behavioral health and related services, ongoing community and provider trainings are being provided in the community, both by member organizations and MHSU Alliance staff. For a list of key trainings, see Appendix D).

**The MHSU Alliance has brought significant funding to the community to support planning and implementation of new and improved services**

Since the inception of the MHSU Alliance in 1999, grants and technical assistance related to MHSU Alliance priorities have infused at least $3.5M into our community to support behavioral health initiatives and programs. A successful 2018 ballot measure, supported by a MHSU Alliance study and report of recommendations, will bring $16M annually to the community to support a behavioral health treatment facility and mental health and substance use services and supports throughout Larimer County.

**The MHSU Alliance has supported changes and improvements by providing critical information, data and recommendations**

The MHSU Alliance has brought in State and National experts to study local behavioral health issues and provide findings and recommendations for changes and improvements. MHSU Alliance staff also perform research, collect data, map services, and provide other information critical to planning and decision-making by MHSU Alliance members. (For a list of key studies and reports, see Appendix E).
For More Information, Contact:

Lin Wilder, MA, LPC, Director  
Community Impact Team  
*Health District of Northern Larimer County*  
lwilder@healthdistrict.org

Brian Ferrans, MS, Manager  
Behavioral Health Strategy & Implementation  
*Health District of Northern Larimer County*  
bferrans@healthdistrict.org
## Appendix A
### Membership

### Steering Committee Membership 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role and Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Allen, Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>SummitStone Health Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Battles, Senior Director of Emergency Services</td>
<td>UCH Health, Poudre Valley Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Bower</td>
<td>Consumer and Family Representative (Paramedic, UCH Health EMS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele Christensen, Director of Program Development</td>
<td>Housing Catalyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly Collins, Administrative Director</td>
<td>North Range Behavioral Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Darling, Director of Criminal Justice Services</td>
<td>Larimer County Sheriff’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Gastelle, Chief Probation Officer</td>
<td>State of Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy Hill, Development &amp; Communications Director</td>
<td>foothillsGateway, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Hudgens, Executive Director, CSU Health Network</td>
<td>Colorado State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Kendall, RN, Sr. Manager Emergency Department</td>
<td>Banner Fort Collins Medical Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly LeMasurier, Director</td>
<td>Homeward 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Lewis, Chief Deputy District Attorney</td>
<td>District Attorney’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey Lyon, Health Planning and Evaluation Specialist</td>
<td>Larimer County Department of Health and Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Morgan</td>
<td>Consumer and Family Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Plock, Executive Director</td>
<td>Health District of Northern Larimer County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staci Shaffer, Jail Lieutenant</td>
<td>Larimer County Sheriff’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica Smith, Administrator</td>
<td>Mountain Crest Behavioral Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Sowder, Social Sustainability Dept. Head</td>
<td>City of Fort Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Stolen, Behavioral Health Project Director</td>
<td>Larimer County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan Sutherland</td>
<td>Substance Abuse Recovery Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcie Votipka, Director of Student Services</td>
<td>Poudre School District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Updated April 9, 2019*
## Subcommittees and Workgroups Related to Alliance Priority Areas

May 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcommittee</th>
<th>Workgroup</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions to Mental Health Service Gaps</td>
<td>Guidance Team</td>
<td>Identify and fill critical gaps in behavioral health services in Larimer County. Support implementation of facility and services supported by new tax monies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing Behavioral Health Grant</td>
<td>Workgroups</td>
<td>Transform perceptions and treatment of SUDs in two key organizations in community (SummitStone &amp; Criminal Justice) through assessment, training, and technical assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent Utilizer System Engagement (FUSE) Pilot</td>
<td>Workgroup</td>
<td>Implement a pilot to provide housing and intensive treatment and support services to 20 chronically homeless individuals. May be scaled up as Pay for Success Project to provide longer term innovative funding strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naloxone Education and Distribution</td>
<td>Workgroup</td>
<td>Unify, support and increase local efforts to make Naloxone available to those who may be able to reverse an overdose and save a life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Commitments and Holds</td>
<td>Ad-Hoc Workgroup</td>
<td>Identify issues and opportunities to improve processes; develop ongoing agreements; prepare for system-level changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Staff

Organize, research, facilitate, plan, manage budget, coordinate information-sharing across collaborating agencies, and assure progress and attainment of Alliance goals.
Staff Liaison Work with Other Community Initiatives Related to Alliance Priorities

May 2019

Northern Colorado Opioid Prevention Workgroup
Steering Committee

Medication Assisted Treatment Implementation and Expansion

Facilitate implementation of MAT, re-entry programming, and naloxone distribution in criminal justice settings

Unify, support and increase local efforts to make naloxone available to those who may be able to reverse an overdose and save a life.

Implement Hub and Spoke Model in Northern Colorado

Workgroup Representation and Leadership

Leap Early Childhood Coalition
Socio-Emotional Development for Ages 0-5

Naloxone Education and Distribution Workgroup

Steering Committee

Provide leadership and guidance to Leap Coalition to accomplish goals and ensure cultural consciousness:

- Increase workforce connections and capacity
- Increase community understanding of young children’s social-emotional needs
- Support coordinated multidisciplinary approach to early identification and interventions for social-emotional concerns of young children

Strengthening the Care for early childhood through improving communication between PCPs and BH providers, and increasing knowledge of early childhood mental health

Workgroup Leadership (same as on reverse side)

Integrated Care Workgroup

Zero Suicide Implementation Workgroup

Workgroup Representation

Expand implementation of Zero Suicide Model among healthcare and non-healthcare organizations in northern Colorado.

Workgroup Representation

Staff
Appendix C
Key Areas of Impact for the Mental Health and Substance Use Alliance of Larimer County

Key Impact Areas of the Mental Health and Substance Use Alliance of Larimer County (MHSU Alliance)

Awareness
Improve the likelihood that community members will recognize MH and SUD problems and seek treatment due to decreased stigma, increased understanding of MI/SUD as health issues, knowledge of resources, comfort with and ability to talk about issues, etc.

Effectiveness
Ensure that our professionals are providing effective, quality best-practice interventions (prevention, early identification and intervention, treatment and harm reduction) that are based on evidence and reflect the most current state of the art.

Capacity/Access
Ensure sufficient capacity of services, and address barriers to care (such as affordability, transportation, geographic accessibility, wait times, etc.) so that people are able to access the care they need.

Impact Policies
Monitor, research and take action on key legislative and policy issues.
Educate and build relationships with policy makers.
Facilitate local implementation of new legislation, regulations and policies.
Appendix D
Key Trainings Provided in the Community Related to MHSU Alliance Priorities

Fill gaps in mental health and substance use disorder treatment: In addition to presentations made by Mental Health Matters staff, nearly 1,000 individuals received presentations by MHSU Alliance staff and members in 2018 related to findings of the “What Will It Take? Solutions to Mental Health Service Gaps in Larimer County” report.

Ensure that community members have the skills to be early identifiers and help people get care early (Priority of the MHSU Alliance’s Early Identification and Early Intervention Workgroup):
- Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid (SummitStone Health Partners, the Connections Program and the Health Sector Partnership)
- Question, Persuade Refer (QPR) suicide prevention training (Connections Program)
- Community and parent educational workshops: Regular and ongoing community and parent educational workshops on behavioral health related topics (Connections Program)

Facilitate the use of state-of-the-art and evidence-based approaches by mental health and substance use disorder treatment and service providers in our community. Examples include:
- Creating an Ecosystem of Treatment and Recovery: Using Science to Build and Ecosystem of Treatment and Recovery training event - May 2018 (MHSU Alliance, Health District and Colorado Health Foundation)
- Quarterly Therapist Networking & Training events for behavioral health care providers with 60-100 participants (Connections Program, initiated due to MHSU Alliance priority)
- DSM-5 Update Training for nearly 100 participants (Connections Program, initiated due to MHSU Alliance priority)
- Co-Occurring Disorder Training Series for hundreds of participants (MHSU Alliance)
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Public Safety: Ongoing training of law enforcement officers in Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety (Connections Program, initiated due to MHSU Alliance priority)
- Advancing Behavioral Healthcare Grant of the Colorado Health Foundation: A two year grant (2018 and 2019) to provide training, technical assistance and consulting to enhance best practices related to addiction to SummitStone Health Partners and Larimer County Criminal Justice Services.
- Medication Assisted Treatment in the Emergency Department: Training of Emergency Department and hospital system personnel to support implementation of initiation on MAT – December 2018
- Behavioral Health Summit: Kickoff event to establish foundational knowledge for decision makers (related to 1A funding for behavioral health) – February 2019
- Addiction Science, Treatment and Stigma Reduction: Ongoing training in addiction science, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), Naloxone use, and other related topics by Community Impact Team staff. (Note: over 600 individuals attended these trainings in the first quarter of 2019 alone).
# Appendix E

## Key Studies and Reports of the Mental Health and Substance Use Alliance of Larimer County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study/Report</th>
<th>Content and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Will it Take?: Solutions to Mental Health Service Gaps in Larimer County; April 2018</td>
<td>Incorporated in its entirety into the Larimer County Behavioral Health Master Plan, this study and its recommendations was a key impetus for the Larimer County Commissioners referring a ballot measure 1A in 2016 and 2018, which passed in 2018. This tax funding will infuse Larimer County with nearly $16M in its first year to support both a new behavioral health facility as well as mental health and substance use prevention and treatment services throughout the community. The MHSU Alliance and its members had also worked for tax funding for behavioral health services in Larimer County in 2008 before the 2016 and 2018 ballot measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for the Development of Critical Behavioral health Services in Larimer County, February 2016 (Both with NIATx consulting)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larimer County High Utilizers Study; February 2016 (TriWest Group consulting)</td>
<td>This study of Larimer County high utilizers of acute and crisis services outlined their patterns of service use and the associated costs to the community. Recommendations have since resulted in the development of a planned set of interventions to meet the needs of frequent utilizers and determination of the feasibility for these interventions to be implemented in a “pay for success” project. Currently, key steps towards implementation include addressing recommendations to develop better data collection and sharing, as well as the development of a Frequent Utilizer Systems Engagement (FUSE) demonstration project to providing housing and supportive services to 20 chronically homeless high utilizers of the criminal justice system. This project is intended to be scaled up into full community implementation through community and/or pay for success funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequent feasibility study in 2017 with University of Utah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Image credit: Larimer County Mental Health and SubSTANCE USE*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study/Report</th>
<th>Content and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Review of Early Identification and Early Intervention (EIEI) Services and Needs in Larimer County; November 2011 (TriWest Group consulting) | These reports resulted from and supported the work of the MHSU Alliance’s Early Identification and Early Intervention workgroup. The 3 top recommendations of this workgroup have been realized through:  
  • The development of the Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) team at Connections to meet the needs of youth and families experiencing emerging behavioral health issues.  
  • An increase in provision of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) across the County by Summitstone Health Partners, Connections, and other providers.  
  • The development and subsequent work of the Leap Coalition that focuses on work to improve the socioemotional health of children ages 0-5. |
| Imagining a Better Mental Health System for Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults in Larimer County; February 2010 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Mental Illness and Substance Abuse in Larimer County: Foundation of Progress, Future of Hope; September 2008 | This report quantified the first five years of the work of the (then) Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership and was used to inform the development of future Partnership and community priorities. It also resulted in a 3-year Advancing Colorado’s Behavioral Healthcare grant that enabled us to assess our community’s competence with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders, provide training and technical assistance to improve our approach to co-occurring disorders, and develop the Community Dual Disorder Treatment (CDDT) program to provide evidence-based services to people with intensive co-occurring disorders. CDDT is now integrated with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team at SummitStone Health Partners. |
| Mental Illness and Substance Abuse in Larimer County: The Challenges We Face Today; February 2001 | This report informed the planning and development of the Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership and helped the Partnership identify priorities and create workgroups. It also resulted in a five year Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant to support early priorities such as improving information and referrals; creating integrated care environments in local safety net clinics; and redesigning the entire crisis response system in Larimer County, among others. The recommendations also resulted in development of the Connections Program. |