

Addressing Mental Health Together

MN Health Collaborative partners are working together to improve mental health care and pathways at two points of service within healthcare systems: in primary care and in Emergency Departments (EDs).

With a shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in many areas of the state, along with increased use of the ED for mental health needs, MN Health Collaborative partners recognized an urgent need to make real progress in improving systems to support mental health.

Improving the ED experience for mental health

In Minnesota, a dramatic increase in emergency department visits for mental health needs has resulted in increased waiting time for patients, increased number of transfers between EDs and hospitals, and long lengths of stay for patients in the ED, before being transferred for further care.

In an innovative approach, MN Health Collaborative partners are working together to develop and implement shared standards of practice to address these challenges to better support both patients and staff in the face of this increased need. They are working to effectively use and leverage existing resources, as well as develop a better understanding of where additional resources are needed.

ED visits for mental health and substance abuse increased 75% from 2010-2017, while total ED visits increased 16.2%.

The suicide rate in Minnesota has increased by 40%, with 745 suicides reported in 2016.

In 2018, MN Health Collaborative partners developed shared standards for medical clearance evaluation, including labs needed, to ensure a person is medically stable for transition to inpatient psychiatric facilities. Implementing these medical clearance practices will decrease the wide local variation which at times, results in unnecessary tests and delays in patients receiving needed treatment.

In addition, recommendations to improve practices around assessing and intervening for suicide prevention are in development and will begin implementation in 2019. The group is also developing recommendations and shared standards for better assessing and effectively intervening to deescalate patient agitation, which can be a potential precursor to violence. This will be followed by a focus on improving transitions between the ED and needed level of care for ongoing treatments.

Adopting shared standards requires cultivating partnership and trust between EDs and inpatient units, and, critically, between organizations.

Strong commitment to transparency regarding challenges and learning by this working group is already leading to improved practices, as partners gain critical shared understanding of structural barriers and potential ways to bridge them.

Shared vision for integrated behavioral health

Another area of focus for the MN Health Collaborative is to improve people's access to mental health care in primary care clinics and improve health outcomes. This effort began with creating a shared community vision for integrated behavioral health, building on past work by multiple organizations.

Minnesota has been at the forefront of integrating behavioral health needs into primary care since 2009, with the ICSI-led DIAMOND initiative. This work resulted in widespread adoption of the PHQ-9 to screen for depression and adoption of a depression care measure for statewide reporting through Minnesota Community Measurement. However, subject matter experts within the MN Health Collaborative know that the benefits of integrated behavioral health have not yet been fully realized.

Recognizing increased need in our communities, MN Health Collaborative partners have defined a shared set of evidence-based standard practices for addressing mental health needs in primary care that have been shown to improve patient care and outcomes.

Each Collaborative partner organization is working to adopt each of these practices. Together, this working group is focused on how to assure sustainability of these elements, including identifying and making key infrastructure changes needed for stronger intra-organizational partnerships.

One in five Americans experienced mental illness in the past year

Half of Minnesotans with mental illness are not receiving any treatment

Nationally, only 25% of patients receive effective mental health care

The majority of counties in Minnesota have a shortage of psychiatrists, and access to therapists is also low

The shortage of mental health providers is expected to increase due to an aging workforce

The MN Health Collaborative is group of health leaders from 15 organizations working together to develop shared sustainable solutions to healthcare's toughest challenges.

MN Health Collaborative members transparently share and learn from one another, designing practical, evidence-based and innovative approaches to shared problems.