

For more information:

Rob Henken
President
Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240 or 414-708-4392
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

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Report calls for redesigned mental health system in Milwaukee County with greater emphasis on community-based treatment and care

*Analysis suggests need for enhanced partnerships with private hospitals and
redirection of public resources to the community*

MILWAUKEE – *Wednesday, October 6, 2010* – A report released today by a team of national mental health consultants contains a series of inter-connected recommendations that could radically transform the manner in which adult mental health services are accessed and delivered in Milwaukee County.

The set of 10 recommendations addresses:

- Capacity issues at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex.
- A potential role for private hospitals in addressing system gaps.
- Ways to enhance community-based and outpatient services to promote a broader array of services for individuals at various functional levels.
- The need to reduce the volume of patients brought involuntarily by law enforcement to the county's Mental Health Complex.
- The need for greatly enhanced data collection and performance measurement to guide the redesign process.
- Several additional elements deemed critical to meeting the needs of individuals seeking or requiring mental health care in Milwaukee County.

“No single report can tell the entire story of a county’s populations in need, and the services required or the barriers that exist to meeting those needs,” said David Hughes of Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), the lead consultant on the project. “However, the information in this report and the process by which the information was developed can provide a powerful impetus to create an improved behavioral health system throughout Milwaukee County.”

The report culminates a two-year project initiated by the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership (a collaboration headed by the five major health systems in Milwaukee County), the Medical Society of Milwaukee County, and the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. The project’s main objective was to examine gaps in the existing adult mental health care delivery system and devise ways to transform that system into one that more closely mirrors national best practices and guidance issued by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health.

After initial research by the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum (PPF) into mental health system redesign efforts in other parts of the country, project stakeholders retained Massachusetts-based HSRI to be the lead consultant on the Milwaukee redesign effort, while retaining PPF as local consultant and facilitator. HSRI added another consulting firm – Technical Assistance Collaborative – for additional expertise, particularly in the realm of health care finance.

The roster of project sponsors also was expanded to include other government, health care, advocacy and civic organizations, including the Wisconsin Department of Health Services; the Medical College of Wisconsin; Rogers Memorial Hospital; Disability Rights Wisconsin; and the Greater Milwaukee and Faye McBeath Foundations. A complete list of project funders is attached to this release.

“One of the elements that makes this project unique, and that provides strong hope for successful implementation of its recommendations, is the diverse and influential set of stakeholders who have funded and guided it,” said Public Policy Forum President Rob Henken. “Having both county and state government, private health care providers, the Medical College, mental health

advocates and consumers, and civic leaders collaborating on this project bodes well for the type of community-wide effort that will be needed to transform the system.”

The project used a comprehensive data-driven approach to analyze system gaps and weaknesses and develop themes and recommendations. Specific data sources included:

- *Community Meetings:* Three public community meetings were held to solicit feedback on the project and the need for system redesign.
- *Key Informant Interviews and Group Meetings:* Interviews and group feedback sessions were held with more than 50 people and organizations.
- *Service Planning and Evaluation Surveys:* A series of surveys was conducted with case managers, physicians, inpatient discharge planners, and consumers to assess and analyze system gaps.
- *Health System Administrator Surveys:* Additional surveys involved public and private health system administrators in order to better understand capacity needs and issues.
- *Service Utilization and Outcome Data:* To understand the rates of service utilization and the ways in which individuals move in and out of the mental health service system, the project team analyzed volumes of state and county-level administrative data.

After laying out and explaining data findings, the report cites five key issues and themes that emerged from the data:

- **Consumer Refusals** – multiple data sources showed that consumers in Milwaukee County are refusing services at a very high rate. The analysis suggests this occurs for a number of reasons, including a desire for more shared or independent decision-making, a need for more education regarding available services, and the significant number of individuals who enter the system involuntarily.
- **Opportunities to Increase and Expand Community-Based Services** – very few individuals are receiving an adequate amount of community-based services, including outpatient care. This suggests the need for a re-evaluation of the structure and amounts of community-based services, including outpatient and case management services.

- **Peer-Operated and Peer Support Services** – analysis of the data demonstrated that peer-operated and peer support services should be further developed, as well as enhanced consumer and provider education regarding the benefits of these services.
- **Use of Crisis Services** – Milwaukee County consumers are receiving crisis services more often than any other services, and the frequency of emergency detentions is a major challenge. This suggests a need for greater availability of crisis prevention and crisis alternative services such as drop-in centers, crisis phone lines, and crisis respite.
- **Inpatient Service Capacity** – the data and analysis suggest that while there is sufficient inpatient capacity in Milwaukee County, there is a need to reorganize care so that the existing beds are used more efficiently.

The report provides recommendations in 10 broad areas of mental health treatment and system design, with several additional recommendations in sub-categories for each. Funding considerations also are discussed, with an underlying assumption that it is unlikely that significant additional fiscal resources will be available. The 10 broad recommendations, none of which stand alone, are as follows:

1. Downsize and redistribute inpatient capacity.
2. Involve private health systems in a more active role.
3. Reorganize crisis services and expand alternatives.
4. Reduce emergency detentions.
5. Reorganize and expand community-based services.
6. Promote a recovery-oriented system through person-centered approaches and peer supports.
7. Enhance and emphasize housing supports.
8. Ensure cultural competency.
9. Ensure trauma-informed care.
10. Enhance quality assessment and improvement programs.

“It is critical for those considering next steps to appreciate the inter-connected nature of the recommendations,” said HSRI’s Hughes. “For example, the county’s efforts to potentially downsize its inpatient and long-term care operations will not be successful without new and different types of investments in community-based and outpatient care, enhanced partnerships with private health systems, and development of better information technology systems to measure progress.”

“At the same time, it is questionable whether the comprehensive array of community-based and crisis services recommended in the report will be affordable without diverting some existing public resources from inpatient and long-term care,” he added.

The full report can be accessed at the Forum’s web site, www.publicpolicyforum.org.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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List of Project Funders

Assurant Health Foundation

Aurora Health Care

Cenpatico

Columbia St. Mary's

Disability Rights Wisconsin

Faye McBeath Foundation

Froedtert Hospital

Greater Milwaukee Foundation

iCare

Managed Health Services

Medical College of Wisconsin

Medical Society of Milwaukee County

Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division

Milwaukee Health Care Partnership

Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force

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Rogers Memorial Hospital

State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services

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