

## **ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN SAUK COUNTY**

A discussion paper prepared by  
Sauk County Council on Collaborative Initiatives  
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### **I. What do we mean when we say “mental health services?” What do we think that term encompasses?**

For the purpose of this review, the Sauk County Council on Collaborative Initiatives has defined mental health services as agencies whose efforts support and treat people of all ages with mental health issues, which can be defined as a level of mental, behavioral and emotional distress that leads to an inability to function in one or more areas of one’s daily life including school, work, home or community:

When looking at mental health issues, one must first define in terms of scope and time, the differences between emergent and ongoing care, access into care and different points of access.

### **II. What should access to mental health services look like in Sauk County?**

Mental Health services should be affordable, accessible, responsive and punctual. Transportation should be available for residents of smaller towns or who cannot currently afford treatment. Those who do not have insurance are limited to only a few mental health agencies while those who have insurance are limited to a defined number of counseling sessions.

### **III. How would one describe the ideal system for mental health services for children and teens?**

#### **A. Education**

- Community agencies’ staff would have trauma informed training which would enable them to more readily spot warning signs of mental health issues including behavioral problems. Staff working specifically with youth would have training to recognize “red flags” related to domestic violence and family issues.

#### **B. Resources**

- In Sauk County there would be a ‘trauma informed’ Human Services Specialist who works specifically with children and teens.
- Currently, Lutheran Social Services and Sauk County’s “Families Come First” offer in-home counseling for teams although clients can expect to wait several weeks for services. There are also a limited number of support groups for children and teens. An increase in the number of in-home counseling services, support groups and psychosocial interventions offered to children and teens would potentially reduce

antisocial behavior in disruptive disorders, truancy rates and severe mental health episodes later in life.

- Human and Children Services would hire mental health interns to work in underserved communities.
- Various therapy specialists (including play, art and talk therapy) would be available to serve children, youth and adults.
- Youth and adults would have access to day treatment centers in a timely manner.

#### **IV. What parts of this vision are already present to some degree? What portions of the present service delivery system are working well?**

There are several mental health service providers in Sauk county including: Hope House of South Central Wisconsin, Lutheran Social Services, Pauquette Center, Pathway Clinic, The Department of Health and Family Services and The Department of Workplace Development, all of whom offer assistance in Baraboo, Reedsburg, Sauk Prairie and Wisconsin Dells.

- Hope House of South Central Wisconsin offers comprehensive mental health counseling and therapy for adults and children surviving domestic violence and sexual assault.
- The Sauk County “Families Come First” Initiative strives to keep children in their homes through the establishment of a comprehensive, coordinated community based interagency system of care, centered on the child and family.
- Sauk County Department of Health and Human Services’ County Community Support Program is available for adults with severe persistent mental illness, brain injury, advanced directives and learning disabilities. Comprehensive Community Services assessment Health Department can help those who need meds.
- National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI)-South Central Wisconsin advocates, educates and supports people living with mental illnesses.
- Pathway Clinic provides dual diagnosis drug rehab with a primary focus on mental health services and drug rehab in Baraboo and Prairie du Sac.

There is also discussion of developing tele-health in Sauk County, where an individual could consult with a psychiatrist telephonically for a defined number of visits to increase access to care among rural areas. While new applications including video-conferencing, streaming media and wireless communications are being developed, significant barriers to making these technologies an integral part of daily health care practice remain including accessibility and financial affordability for clients.

#### **V. What are some of the gaps in mental health services for people in Sauk County?**

##### **A. Education**

- There is a need for mental health in-service training opportunities for community service providers to learn how to approach the topic of mental health treatment with individuals

who may be showing warning signs, to respond appropriately and to obtain immediate care when a mental health crisis erupts in the workplace.

## **B. Resources**

- Currently, Sauk County does not have in-patient psychiatric services for acute hospitalization requirement; instead, services for this need, i.e. geriatric psychiatric services, are contracted through Stoughton.
- Medical services fail to recognize the scope of the problem partly because there is a shortage of psychiatrists, and because general service providers are not equipped to deal with mental health issues and service delivery.
- There is a shortage of group and transitional housing available for people living with mental illness. There is also a need for mental health residency treatment centers for children, teens and adults.
- Distance continues to be a barrier to health care access, as Sauk County is a rural area and many people living with mental illness cannot afford transportation.

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