

Panel formed to improve child mental health in greater Rochester area

Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes will issue report in November on recommended changes



John Urban, president and CEO of the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, announces the formation Thursday of a new commission to study ways to improve child behavioral and mental health in the Finger Lakes region. The commission is tasked with recommending policy, practice and funding changes by November.

By Messenger Post

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ROCHESTER — The Greater Rochester Health Foundation has launched a new initiative focused on improving children's behavioral health services in Ontario County and eight other counties served by the organization.

On Thursday the foundation announced the creation of a Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes. The panel will present a report in November that will outline recommended policy, practice and funding changes to improve mental health services for children.

The commission held its first meeting Thursday night

"The Health Foundation convened this commission based on consistent input we had received from childcare providers, schools, pediatricians and children's mental health clinicians, all of whom expressed concern about the region's children's behavioral health system, its capacity, and in some cases, its quality," stated John Urban, president and CEO of the Health Foundation. "The group we've called upon to support this effort is diverse, action-oriented and determined to see the necessary policy, practice and funding changes happen."

The commission consists of a multi-disciplinary group of experienced and respected community and health care leaders and stakeholders including schools, health care, government and criminal justice.

Sandy Parker and Tom Richards are commission co-chairs. Mike Scharf, of the University of Rochester Medical Center, is serving as the commission's project lead, and Bonnie DeVinney is the commission consultant.

"We're bringing together diverse experts and stakeholders who will speak with a unified voice to create children's behavioral health issue awareness among lawmakers," said Richards, the former mayor of Rochester. "We are focused on identifying what reforms need to happen so we can improve the health of the children in our region."

The commission is working within an ambitious and aggressive timeline to ensure the report is complete in the upcoming months.

"By releasing recommended policy changes, and clearly defining the rationale for these reforms, we hope to give the Legislature what they need to drive these changes forward," said Parker, former president and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance.

As the commission project lead, Scharf and his team bring an experienced clinical voice.

"One in five children lives with serious behavioral and mental health conditions," Scharf said. "Behavioral and mental illness causes an incredible amount of suffering on kids and families and can sometimes have deadly consequences. Most people have some awareness of this issue, but do not necessarily know of resources available to them. It's time for our region to come up with a thoughtful, communitywide response to improve the health of youth and families."

The Greater Rochester Health Foundation serves Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming and Yates counties. For more information, visit www.thegrhf.org.