

Project eyes mental health services for kids

Patti Singer , Staff writer 6:28 p.m. EDT April 9, 2015



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An inventory of the mental and behavioral health services for children in the nine-county region will be conducted over the next few months, with expectations that a report detailing barriers and potential solutions presented to the community by November.

The Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes was announced Thursday at the Greater Rochester Health Foundation, which is spending \$300,000 to fund the project.

"The issue of leaving children with serious mental health issues untreated is one this community can no longer have go unnoticed and no longer go unaddressed," said John Urban, president and chief executive officer of the GRHF.

The commission will look at where and how services for children are provided — in the city, the suburbs and in rural areas. It's more than just how many visits providers can accommodate, although that is pressing need, said Dr. Michael Scharf, chief of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Some type of behavioral or mental health issue affects 1 in 5 children, according to data reported by the GRHF. However, only 20 percent of those affected receive the services they need.

While he was at a news conference explaining how the commission would do it's job, he knew people were calling him trying to find out what to do about their children.



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Dr. Michael Scharf of the University of Rochester Medical Center said information from schools in the region and focus groups will help the Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes determine how to improve care for kids who need mental health care. (Photo: Patti Singer staff photographer/@PattiSingerRoc)

"Right now there is youth in our emergency room," he said. "I can also guarantee you by the time I go back to my office, I'll have at least two voicemails from families who have called me trying to get care for their kids."

The commission has contracted with the University of Rochester to do the legwork. Scharf said a team has been doing some research prior to the formation of the commission, and that data will be incorporated along with new information to reflect each community in counties from Orleans to Seneca, and then make recommendations about types and size of services.

"We want to define the need and have appropriate services," he said.

The commission will consider how places of worship or other resources can provide prevention and intervention services in a way that meets cultural and community needs.

"The solutions aren't going to be found by using only traditional methods," said David Putney, director of the Monroe County Office of Mental Health. That's true not just for delivering care and treatment but also for finding those in need.

"Who is out there that we don't even know about," said Putney, who represents the county on the commission. "People either don't know about or how to access or are too intimidated to access services." He said it's important to make sure that people whose kids are in need of care can be encouraged to seek it.

The commission is led by former Rochester Mayor Tom Richards and former Rochester Business Alliance leader Sandy Parker. The commission has 26 working members, representatives from such agencies and organizations as the City School District, Monroe County, several children's advocacy organizations and nonprofits. It will involve parents, and there are plans for a public forum. The commission also has observers, such as Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle. It's expected that some of the recommendations may relate to policy or legislation.

Urban pledged that the report would not sit on a shelf but be a blueprint for change. GRHF has extensively funded initiatives throughout the region and for adults and children, including childhood obesity. Patricia Woods, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association and a member of the commission, praised the foundation for taking on this aspect of children's health.

"Mental health is such an important part of overall health," she said. "Being the health foundation, it's definitely a piece of what they should be looking at."

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Who's on the commission

The following people were named to the Commission on Children's Behavioral Health in the Finger Lakes, which is being funded by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation.

- Melisza Campos, Rochester School District.
- Barbara Conradt, executive director, Hillside Children's Center.
- Trilby de Jung, Esq., CEO, Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, invited observer.
- Dr. Larry Denk, medical director, Rochester General Pediatric Associates.
- Bonnie DeVinney, consultant.
- Honorable Craig J. Doran, administrative judge for Seventh Judicial District.
- Emma Forbes-Jones, Ph.D., clinical psychologist.
- Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., invited observer.
- Bryan Hetherington, chief counsel of Empire Justice Center.
- A. Dirk Hightower, executive director of the Children's Institute.
- Dr. Jeffrey Kaczorowski, president and chief children's advocate, The Children's Agenda.
- Loretta Kruger, executive director, Head Start Robert Lebman, president and CEO, Huther Doyle.
- Patricia Leo, director, community investment and synergy fund of the United Way of Greater Rochester.
- Dr. Martin Lustick, chief corporate medical director, Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield.
- Patricia Woods, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association.
- Ray Mayoliz, manager of youth outreach and violence prevention for Rochester's Department of Recreation and Youth Services.
- Miguel Melendez, Ibero-American Development Corporation.

- New York state Assembly Majority Leader Joe Morelle, invited observer.
- Kevin McGowan, superintendent, Brighton Central School District.
- Shaun Nelms, adjunct professor and deputy superintendent of East High EPO, Rochester School District.
- Sandy Parker, former president and CEO, Rochester Business Alliance, co-chair.
- David L. Putney, mental health director, Monroe County Office of Mental Health.
- Tom Richards, former Rochester mayor, co-chair.
- Joseph E. Robach, New York state Senator, invited observer.
- Dr. Michael Scharf, child and adolescent psychiatrist, University of Rochester Medical Center, project lead.
- Jacob Scott, Rochester School District Guidance Department.
- Erick Stephens, Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency.
- Sheree L. Toth, director, University of Rochester Mt. Hope Family Center.
- John Urban, president and CEO, Greater Rochester Health Foundation