

June 2012

Fact Sheet on Coordinating Children's and Youth Behavioral Health Services: The SBHA Role¹

Children's mental health is clearly a public health issue. One estimate puts the total economic costs of behavioral health disorders among youth in the U.S. at nearly \$250 billion annually. Behavioral health disorders among young people burden not only traditional behavioral health programs, but also multiple other state service systems that support young people and their families – most notably the education, child welfare, foster care, primary medical care and juvenile justice systems. Over one half of all lifetime cases of behavioral health disorders begin by age fourteen (14).

Numerous national reports underscore the importance of addressing child and adolescent mental health from a population-based approach that is comprised of a continuum of programs and services ranging from health promotion and prevention to treatment. Behavioral health promotion and prevention efforts need to start early in fostering optimal social and emotional development. Research indicates that starting prevention efforts early may help protect children from behavioral health problems in adolescence and young adulthood. In order to effectively address children's mental health, SBHAs work to improve community behavioral health systems that balance health promotion, disease prevention, early detection and intervention, and treatment.

SBHAs work to ensure that effective home and community-based services -- that help children and youth succeed at home, in school and in their communities – are developed. SBHAs also identify and divert youth living with serious mental health conditions from detention to appropriate community treatment.

SBHAs coordinate community-level systems that are needed to support the behavioral health needs of young people. SBHAs through the application of policies, programs, and practices aimed at eliminating risks and increasing strengths, have helped reduce the number of new cases of behavioral health disorders and significantly improve the lives of young people.

One example is the promotion -- through public education initiatives – of smoking cessation programs.

SBHAs support the development of comprehensive, community-based systems of care for children and adolescents with serious emotional disorders and their families.

¹ SBHAs are state substance abuse and mental health authorities, and the term *behavioral health* refers to substance abuse and mental health.

“Systems of care” is an approach to the delivery of services that recognizes the importance of family, school and community, and seeks to promote the full potential of every child and youth by addressing their physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and social needs. National program evaluation data collected for more than a decade indicate that systems of care are successful, resulting in many favorable outcomes for children, youth and their families, including:

- Sustained behavioral health improvements, including improvements for participating children and youth in clinical outcomes after six months of program participation;
- Improvements in school attendance and achievement;
- Reductions in suicide-related behaviors;
- Decreases in utilization of inpatient care and reduced costs due to fewer days in inpatient care;
- Significant reductions in contacts with law enforcement agencies.

A hallmark of this program is that youth and families partner with providers and SBHA policy makers in service delivery and system reform planning and decision-making. Children and youth with serious behavioral health conditions and their families need supports and services from many different child- and family-serving agencies and organizations. Often, these agencies and organizations are serving the same children, youth, and families. By creating partnerships among these groups, Systems of Care -- through SBHAs -- are able to coordinate services and supports that meet the ever-changing needs of each child, youth, and family.