

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Multisystemic Therapy for Texas Youth – February 2020

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is a **proven family- and community-based treatment for at-risk youth** with intensive needs and their families.¹ It has proven most effective for treating youth who have **committed violent offenses**, have serious **mental health** or **substance abuse concerns**, are at risk of **out-of-home placement**, or who have experienced **abuse and neglect**.²

Why Should Texas Invest in MST?

- **MST has been proven to reduce violent crimes by 75%**, compared to routine congregate and other care as usual.³ The reduction is long-term, lasting two decades post-treatment.
- **MST is one of only three proven programs**⁴ that addresses family functioning and association with deviant peers, key risk factors for **reducing violence, other antisocial behaviors, and juvenile justice involvement**.⁵
- A wide variety of treatment placements such as boot camps, group homes, and incarceration have been shown to ultimately **increase criminal activity**.⁶
- A cost-benefit analysis of MST versus treatment as usual or no treatment found that the total program benefit (\$25,201) minus implementation costs was **\$16,847 in net benefits to taxpayers and others** (primarily crime victims). Stated differently, for every dollar spent on the implementation of MST, the **societal return on investment was \$3.02**.⁷
 - For an upper range of cost effectiveness, an evaluation of MST services in New Mexico showed an average savings of **\$71,000 per youth**, beyond the cost of treatment, through **posttreatment reductions in juvenile crimes and Medicaid behavioral health treatment claims**. The **rate of return was 5.87**; for every dollar spent on MST services, **\$5.87 was returned**.⁸

What is the Extent of the Need?

- In Texas, there are an estimated **20,000 children and youth** (ages 6–17) either currently or at very high risk for out-of-home or out-of-school placement because of their **mental health needs**. Using the statewide roll-out of MST in Louisiana and other states as benchmarks, we estimate that of these 20,000, approximately **7,000 Texas youth and their families who are eligible for Medicaid** would benefit from MST services.
- Given that MST services typically last between **three to six months** and MST teams should serve at least **50 youth per year**, Texas would need approximately **140 teams to meet statewide need**.
- Texas currently has **three MST programs** (Harris County, El Paso County, and Nueces County) with a **total of four teams** that operate primarily through juvenile justice dollars. The current teams are meeting **less than 3%** of the estimated need on an annual basis.

What is MST?

- MST is an evidence-based program that helps improve family functioning for **youth (ages 12–17)** and their families and keeps youth safely at home, in school or employed, and out of trouble with the law over the long term.
- The **primary goals** of MST are to: (1) reduce youth criminal activity; (2) reduce other types of antisocial behavior, such as drug abuse; and (3) achieve these outcomes at a cost savings by decreasing rates of incarceration and out-of-home placement.
- MST **reduces delinquent and antisocial behavior** by addressing the core causes of such conduct, expanding the focus of treatment beyond the youth to include the network of systems responsible and caring for them, including family, peers, school, and neighborhood.

What does MST Look Like in Practice?

- MST is delivered **in the youth and family’s natural environment** – home, school, and community. Treatment targets the specific relevant strengths and needs of the family and is provided in an ongoing and intensive manner. MST therapists work with the family throughout the week and are on call and available 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week.⁹
- MST helps youth develop skills to cope with family, school, and neighborhood issues and supports parents in developing skills and resources to help them raise their children. In addition to providing youth and their parents with coping skills, MST mobilizes individual, family, and community resources to support and maintain treatment gains.¹⁰
- MST includes a **built-in suite of services** (i.e., family therapy, vocational support, skills training) that other types of interventions often outsource to other providers.¹¹ These built-in services result in cost savings with MST.
- Structured clinical supervision and quality assurance processes are integral to the model.¹²

Who Delivers MST?¹³

- MST is delivered by specially-trained masters-level or bachelors-level staff with five years or more of clinical experience in mental health or child welfare services.
- Supervisors are highly-trained masters- or doctorate-level professionals who supervise one or two teams of two to four full-time therapists.
- MST teams are structured to handle a caseload of roughly **20 youth** at any given time.
- The average length of treatment for MST is between **three and five months**.¹⁴
- MST teams must be trained by MST® Services of Charleston, South Carolina, or a licensed partner organization, and have a valid program license with MST® Services and the Medical University of South Carolina.

Policy Options

- Make MST available in Medicaid managed care programs by updating managed care contracts to **include MST “in lieu of” targeted case management/mental health rehabilitative services, Level of Care 4.**
 - **86(R) Senate Bill 1177** is currently being implemented by the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), which will update managed care contracts to include a list of “in lieu of services.”
- Add MST as a **Medicaid benefit** by amending the state Medicaid plan, activating the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)-approved MST Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) billing code (H2033), and establishing a rate and service description that will enable the effective delivery of MST.
 - Currently nine states and the District of Columbia have activated the CMS-approved code and cover MST in their Medicaid programs.
- Expand MST through **general revenue appropriations**, beginning with additional funding to juvenile probation departments through the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) and new funding to HHSC for providers outside of the juvenile justice system.
 - Appropriations: roughly **\$525,000 per new team, per year**, which would be substantially offset by Medicaid
 - The annual cost of MST services shows that it is a cost-effective alternative to residential and other placements.
 - The 2017 Harris County Juvenile Probation Department annual report states that it cost about \$1,443,000 to place 40 youth in its custody in private residential treatment facilities (about \$36,000 per youth). Providing MST services early in the youth’s involvement with the juvenile justice system could result in substantial cost savings.
- Expand MST availability through the **Youth Empowerment Services (YES) Waiver**. The YES Waiver is one of the most important ways in which the state can increase the availability of effective, intensive community-based mental health services, including MST, to children and youth with the most serious mental health needs. There are a number of examples from other states that can be used as blueprints for successful implementation of these recommendations in Texas. South Carolina, for example, successfully included several evidence-based practices, including MST, in its 1915(c) Medicaid Waiver.

¹ Henggeler, S. W., & Shoenwald, S. K. (2011). Evidence-based interventions for juvenile offenders and juvenile justice policies that support them. *Social Policy Report*, 25(1): 1–20.

² MST Services. (2018). *MST research at a glance*.

https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Kit/Marketing%20Kit%20Collateral%20igital%20Files/Case%20Study%20and%20Reports/Report%20-%20RAAG_Short_outcomestudies_summary_2018.pdf

³ MST Services. (n.d.). *What makes MST such an effective intervention?*

⁴ The efficacy of MST has been established through 28 highly-rigorous random control trials carried out over the last thirty years. MST Services (2020). *Multisystemic Therapy® (MST®) research at a glance. Published outcomes*,

implementation, and benchmark studies.

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Collateral/Case%20Study%20and%20Reports/R@aG%20Long%202020.pdf>

⁵ Henggeler, S. W., & Scheonwald, S. K. (2011).

⁶ Henggeler, S. W., & Scheonwald, S. K. (2011). Social policy report: Evidence-based interventions for juvenile offenders and juvenile justice policies that support them. *Society for Research in Child Development*, 25(1).

⁷ Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2019, December). Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for court-involved/post-release youth. <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/36>

⁸ Dopp, A. R., & Saranga Coen, A. (2015). *New Mexico MST outcomes tracking project: Results for New Mexico's MST providers, July 2005–June 2015*. New Mexico's Children, Youth & Families Department and the Center for Effective Interventions.

⁹ MST Services. (n.d.). *What makes MST such an effective intervention.*

¹⁰ MST Services. (n.d.). *What makes MST such an effective intervention.*

¹¹ MST Services. (n.d.). *Dramatic cost savings for communities.*

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Kit/Marketing%20Kit%20Collateral%20Digital%20Files/Infographics/Infographic%20-%20MST%20Cost%20Savings.pdf?t=1530302876904>

¹² Henggeler, S. W. (2016). *MST update 2016 including published MST research findings 2014 to present*. Presented at Blueprints for Health Youth Development Conference. http://blueprintsconference.com/presentations/T2-A_MST_Updates.pdf

¹³ Multisystemic Therapy. (n.d.). *Multisystemic Therapy funding and Medicaid standards.*

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Kit/Marketing%20Kit%20Collateral%20Digital%20Files/Word%20Documents/MST%20Medicaid%20Guide%20Docs/MST%20Services%20Medicaid%20Informational%20Packet%2002282018.pdf>

¹⁴ MST Services. (n.d.). *What is MST? Fact Sheet.*

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/295885/MST%20Redesign/Marketing%20Kit/Marketing%20Kit%20Collateral%20Digital%20Files/Fact%20Sheet/Fact%20Sheet%20MST%20Therapy%20Overview%2005222018.pdf>