In 2014, the first year the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) was in operation, MMHPI partnered with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in supporting a study of primary and behavioral health care integration (PBHCI) programs implemented in a selection of Texas community mental health centers (CMHCs). The programs were funded through the Texas 1115(a) Medicaid Waiver Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) pool, approved by CMS in 2011. DSRIP provided financial incentives to state-funded health care providers for creating a broad range of new programs that would expand access to services and improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of care.1 DSRIP funds are used in Texas to provide hospitals and physician groups with incentive payments for improving health care infrastructure and initiating program innovation and redesign. A total of 33 CMHCs were using DSRIP funds to implement and support the integration of primary care and behavioral health services when the study began, specifically aiming to improve the care provided for people with serious mental illness (SMI). In December 2017, an extension of the 1115 Waiver was approved for an additional five-year period, with level funding for the first two years, decreasing funding for the next two years, and no funding for the fifth year to encourage providers to develop sustainability plans for the funded programs.2

The PBHCI study was led by Dr. Rebecca Wells, who began the research while at Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Public Health and completed the project at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health (UTSPH). This evaluation report brief summarizes the major findings of the final report, titled Integrating Primary Care into Mental Health Care for Adults with Serious Mental Illness: Findings from 10 Texas Centers, and suggests key considerations for successful implementation of PBHCI in other provider organizations. Unless otherwise stated, the data and information provided in this document can be found in detail in the full report.3 This research parallels other MMHPI endeavors to share information on integrated behavioral health (IBH), including a 2016 report developed in partnership with St. David’s Foundation, which identifies and describes seven core components of best practice IBH programs.4

**KEY FINDING: COST-RELATED OUTCOMES**

The PBHCI study saw significant client improvement in both the average length of stay per hospitalization and overall hospital encounters, with the average length of stay per hospitalization decreasing by approximately 32% in the first year of integration. The study also found that patients with any hospitalization during the study period were 18% less likely, on average, to use hospital services during the first year of integration. These outcomes suggest patient health conditions were more stable once they received integrated care. The reduction in the number of hospitalizations and shortened length of stay once hospitalized also translated to cost savings. UTSPH researchers estimated that during the two-year period, more than $1,000 per patient per year was saved by reducing the likelihood of hospitalization and, for shorter lengths of stay, more than an additional $1,200 per hospitalization was saved from the accommodations portion of the cost alone.
**KEY FINDING: SCREENING FOR CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS**

UTSPH researchers tracked several standard measures of PBHCI program performance. In this study, UTSPH examined programs’ efforts to screen for co-occurring physical and behavioral health conditions (the fifth of seven core components cited in the MMHPI/St. David’s Foundation IBH report) and found that once patients began receiving integrated care, overall patient screening rates increased for health measures such as body-mass index (BMI), smoking, blood pressure, and hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) (a measure for diabetes). Routine screening that uses universal tools to identify the most common physical health conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension, can ensure early detection and treatment for identified physical health concerns alongside behavioral health needs. In the first year of the program, the average number of patients screened for various physical health concerns increased significantly: fourfold for the body mass index and hypertension, tenfold for smoking, and 78-fold for HbA1c. The accompanying chart shows the change in health screening rates over the first year of integrated care for seven CMHCs from which UTSPH was able to use pre-PBHCI and post-PBHCI data on these measures.

![Change in Health Screening Rates](image)

**KEY FINDING: PATIENT-LEVEL OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENCES OF CARE**

The UTSPH research team measured aspects of patients’ experiences of care, including access to care and participation in health coaching, which often includes good nutrition and exercise.

“My physical health needs are now met; it had been years since I’d seen a doctor.”

All projects increased access to primary care and the majority used “warm hand-offs.” A warm hand-off is a transfer of care between two members of the health care team, where the hand-off occurs in front of the patient and family. Additionally, the CMHCs were able to achieve the PBHCI goal of ensuring same-day appointments and walk-in access, which, according to program leaders, increased primary care use and follow-through with medication and provider recommendations, including “prescriptions” for self-care activities.

“I’m not missing appointments now. It’s easier to come to appointments in one place.”

**ADDITIONAL FINDINGS RELATED TO SUCCESSFUL PBHCI IMPLEMENTATION**

Dr. Wells and her team also examined integrated care outcomes and many of the implementation factors identified in the 2016 MMHPI/St. David’s IBH report. The IBH report offers a road map for providers, funders, advocates, and policymakers who are interested in promoting PBHCI and working systematically toward achieving its promise. Core components that are critical to the successful implementation of PBHCI include elements such as an integrated organizational culture, where integration is actively supported by organization leadership and highlighted in the organization’s vision and mission, and a population health management approach to care, which ensures that patients are assessed and differentiated by their prevalent co-occurring conditions and patterns of utilizing services, using information technology to help identify and support effective interventions at the right time.

Highlights of additional findings from the study are provided below. Where applicable, connections to the MMHPI/St. David’s report on core components of integrated care are noted.

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Results from a 2006 study of life expectancy among people with serious mental illness (SMI) were pivotal in linking physical health and mental health outcomes, and suggested the need for drastic transformation in the U.S. health care delivery system. The authors of the 2006 study reported that across the eight states in the study, which included Texas, adults with SMI on average died in their fifties – decades younger than people in the general population without SMI diagnoses. The leading causes of death among this group were heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular, respiratory, and lung diseases. Although these causes of death were similar to those in the general population, people with SMI had a higher prevalence of certain comorbid physical health concerns (such as diabetes, lung disease, and liver conditions), and were less likely to seek treatment for those physical health concerns because of difficulties associated with mental health needs such as access to care, poverty, lack of housing, and unemployment.
Over the past decade, leading groups began to promote the integration of primary care and behavioral health services, which included integrating wellness and specialty care coordination services in community behavioral health settings. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched a primary and behavioral health care integration (PBHCI) program that funded hundreds of sites nationwide, including several in Texas. One key challenge in implementing PBHCI in community behavioral health settings is the limited amount of evidence-based research that has been conducted on the effectiveness of PBHCI programs for adults with SMI. Nationally, this research is in its early stages and no large-scale, multi-site research has previously been conducted in Texas. The study summarized in this report begins to address the research gap by examining how Texas CMHCs used DSRIP funds to implement PBHCI.

FINANCING AND SUSTAINABILITY OF INTEGRATED CARE

This evaluation project did not include financing needs as a primary focus. However, addressing these needs is critical to ensuring the sustainability of programming. As discussed earlier in this brief, the Texas 1115(a) Medicaid Waiver was extended for an additional four years: full funding will continue in 2018 and 2019, partial funding will be provided in 2020 and 2021, and funding will be discontinued in 2022. This phasing-out of funding in the fifth year presents a need for CMHCs to address the sustainability of IBH programming and identify funding options that will support continued advancements to integrate care without DSRIP funding.

Participation in the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) program is one way that CMHCs can help support IBH programming. Although Texas was not chosen for the SAMHSA CCBHC demonstration program, HHSC continues to work with the CMHCs that were certified as CCBHCs (including seven that were certified during the SAMHSA planning grant), as well as additional CMHCs, to implement the Texas CCBHC pilot project. HHSC plans to expand the CCBHC model of care in Texas and will require alternative payment methodologies for CCBHCs, which would have the potential for delivering multidisciplinary, team-based comprehensive care.

The MMHPI/St. David’s Foundation report on core components of integrated care emphasizes the importance of several financial strategies that can...
help sustain integrated care programming over time in a variety of settings. An important starting point, of course, is to carefully examine and take full advantage of the financing opportunities available from private insurance, some of which are beginning to include value-based payments and other alternatives to fee-for-service reimbursement (in the UTSPH study sample, however, only 8% of the patients had insurance other than Medicaid or Medicare). When a significant portion of the client population is on Medicaid, establishing partnerships with FQHCs could be an effective, financially sustainable approach to delivering IBH. FQHCs under contract with Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) receive incentive payments beyond the MCOs’ contracted payment for reimbursable services. CMHCs do not receive additional payments that the FQHCs collect, but could obtain higher reimbursements if they are partnered with FQHCs. However, as this study shows, FQHC partnerships may include challenges such as a slower acclimation of physical health care staff to the behavioral healthcare environment.

Finally, by using compelling data that show successful implementation of IBH, providers sometimes have the option of negotiating with insurers to pilot new approaches for financing key components of IBH care that are not always easy to finance, including care coordination and even wellness and preventive interventions. Providers might also consider approaches to alternative payment methods that have the potential to more adequately cover costs using the delivery of multidisciplinary, team-based care.

2 Full text of the renewal letter can be found at https://hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/laws-regulations/policies-rules/1115-waiver/waiver-renewal/1115renewal-cmsletter.pdf
3 Wella, R., Kite, B., & Breckenridge, E. (2017, May). Integrating primary care into mental health care for adults with serious mental illness: Findings from 10 Texas centers. Houston, TX: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health.

Support for the study was provided by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The full report was authored by Rebecca Wells, Ellen Breckenridge, and Bobbie Kite at The University of Texas School of Public Health; and Sasha Ajaz and Arman Narayan at Rice University. The report authors would like to thank Tenaya Sunbury, Sarah Roper-Coleman, and Angie Cummings at the Texas HHSC, and Jolene Rasmussen at Texas Council of Community Centers for their instrumental support of this study, as well all the health care professionals, patients, and academic colleagues who provided guidance and other invaluable contributions.

This evaluation report brief was prepared by Kendal Perry, Assistant Director of Evaluation; Lauren Roth, Project Manager, and Jim Zahniser, Senior Director of Evaluation Design. MMHPI team members who provided content and peer review include Andy Keller, President and Chief Executive Officer; Michele R. Guzmán, Vice President of Administration and Senior Director of Evaluation; Nelson Jarrin, Senior Director of Government Affairs; Sam Shore, Senior Director of State-Local Collaboration, and Monica Thyssen, Senior Director of Health Policy. Editorial review provided by Bill Wilson, Senior Clinical Editor. Graphic design was provided by Chris Thiele, Graphic Designer. MMHPI would like to thank the full report authors as well as Monica Smoot, Daniel Dillon, and Gary Rutenberg at Texas HHSC for their contributions to this evaluation report brief.

For more information please contact info@texasstateofmind.org.