

JULIE TESSLER 11/3/15

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The Vermont Council of Developmental and Mental Health Services is part of Vermont Care Partners and represents 16 designated and specialized service agencies that provide developmental, mental health and substance use disorder services. Seven of the agencies are preferred providers for substance use disorder treatment, while all 11 mental health agencies provide outpatient services for individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. In fact, co-occurring services are more the norm than the exception.

As a system of care we have not taken a position on the legislation you are drafting. However, we are clear that if revenues are generated, it would be an important opportunity to invest in the full continuum of mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery services. Designated and specialized services are an important part of that continuum providing community outreach, education, prevention, treatment and recovery services.

An important part of the designated agencies mission is to support individuals and families with the most intensive mental health, addiction and life challenges. Unlike private practitioners, we offer a full array of services addressing the social determinants of health. We partner with law enforcement, courts, DCF, shelters, health care providers and schools. We meet people where they are and support them through addictions, mental health and the full spectrum of social, health and economic challenges. We help people reconnect to natural support systems; stabilize their families and move forward in their lives. We often see people whose coping strategies have been buried by the use of substances and our role is to assist them with support and treatment modalities that improve functioning.

In fiscal year 2014 the designated agencies provided substance use disorder services to 5,363 people and adult outpatient services to 6,685 people. Additionally children and adolescents and individuals served by our Crisis Services, Community Rehabilitation and Treatment and developmental services program also received co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder services.

Across the board these outpatient treatment programs are operating in the red and struggling to meet the demand for services. Underfunding (particularly of services for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured) has been an enormous and growing challenge for the agencies. As a result a number of agencies have waiting lists for services.