

MEMORANDUM

TO: House and Senate Committees on Judiciary
House Committee on Corrections and Institutions
Senate Institutions Committee
House Human Services Committee
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

FROM: Sarah Squirrell, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health (DMH)

DATE: January 11, 2021

SUBJECT: Follow up information per Act 120, Section 30: Plan for Youths with Mental Health Disorders

This memo responds to the following requirement of Act 120, Sec. A.30 which states, *During the 2020 legislative interim, the Agency of Human Services shall develop a plan to provide comprehensive mental health treatment services to youths, including justice-involved youths, with severe mental health disorders. On or before January 15, 2021, the Agency shall report to the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary, the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions, the Senate Institutions Committee, the House Human Services Committee, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on its plans pursuant to this subsection and recommendations for repurposing of the Woodside facility.*

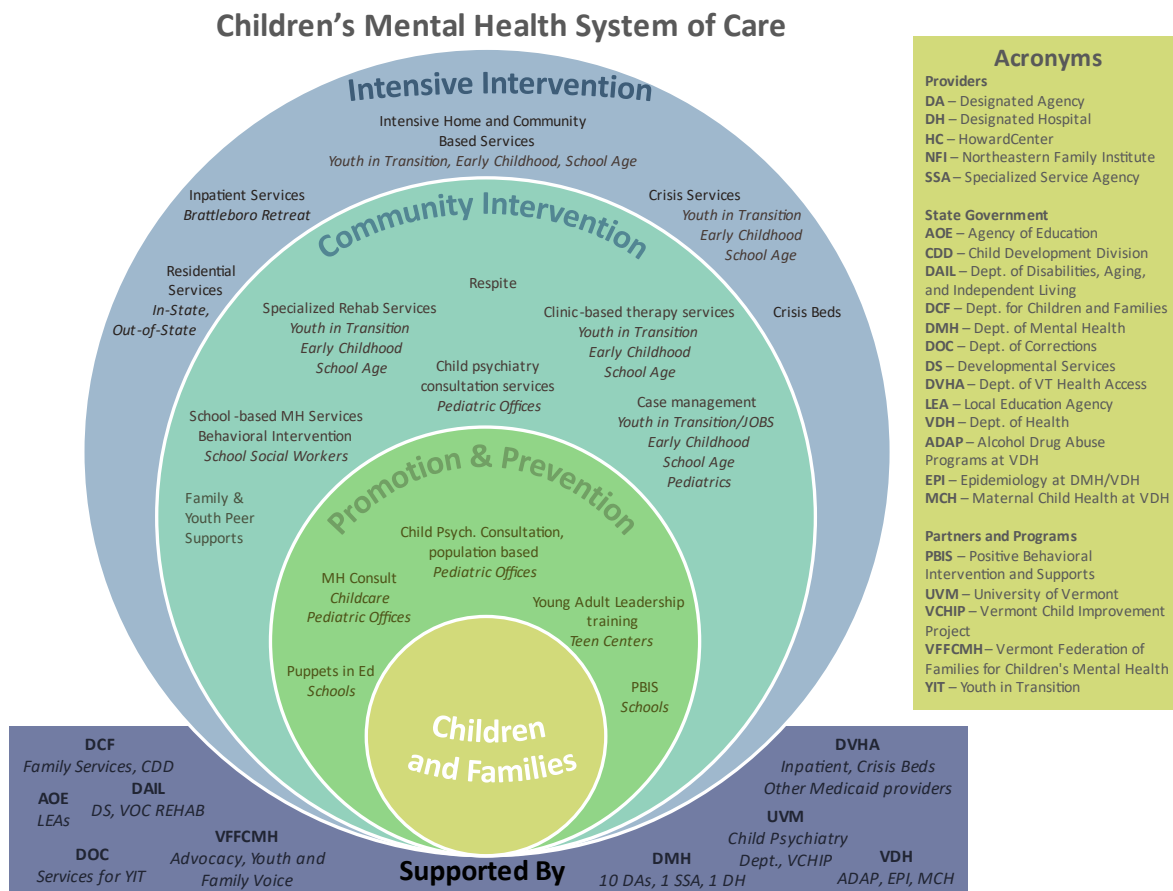
The child, youth and family system of care requires effective collaborations across mental health, child welfare and juvenile justice, developmental disability services, early childhood, education, family organizations, primary care, and a wide range of other stakeholders. Agencies and programs that provide acute and intensive mental health treatment must provide compassionate, and evidence-based care that spans the care continuum from health promotion and disease prevention to early intervention.

There are multiple ways that DMH ensures there is an effective and comprehensive system of care for children and youth who experience mental health challenges which includes justice-involved youth.

- The Department of Mental Health co-chairs the State Interagency Team with the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, which was created under Act 264, 33 VSA § 4302. The State Interagency Team has the following powers and duties.
 1. Submit an annual report to the commissioners of developmental and mental health services, social and rehabilitation services and education on the status of programs for children and adolescents with a severe emotional disturbance which shall include a system of care plan. The system of care plan shall identify the characteristics and number of children and adolescents with a severe emotional disturbance in need of services, describe the educational, residential, mental health or other services needed, describe the programs and resources currently available, recommend a plan to meet the needs of such children and adolescents, and recommend priorities for the continuation or development of programs and resources. *(This is from the Act 264 1988 statute and some agency names have shifted).*
 2. Develop and coordinate the provision of services to children and adolescents with a severe emotional disturbance.
 3. Make recommendations to the local interagency team for resolution of any case of a child or adolescent with a severe emotional disturbance referred by a local interagency team under subsection 4303(f) of this chapter.
 4. Recommend to the Secretaries of Human Services and of Education and the Commissioners of Mental Health and for Children and Families any fiscal, policy, or programmatic change at the local, regional, or State level necessary to enhance the State's system of care for children and adolescents with a severe emotional disturbance and their families.
- Through the Act 264 Process, Local Interagency Teams (LIT) were also created. These teams, led by the Designated Agencies, are responsible for supporting local teams in determining how to best coordinate services for children and youth with disabilities across the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services. As well, the LIT is responsible for coordinating higher level supports which can include residential treatment facilities.
- DMH is leveraging federally funded initiatives to 1) support system improvements for school based mental health services; 2) identify best approaches for integrated primary care and mental health services for children, youth and families; and 3) establish a coordinated system of mental health supports for pregnant and postpartum women. This includes screening for maternal depression and related mental health challenges during obstetric and pediatric visits and creating pathways for assessment, brief intervention, and referral to treatment and other support services.
- The Department is working with partners across AHS and with representatives from Designated Agencies and Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health to explore strategies to strengthen mobile response and support services for the child, youth and family system. The expansion of programming is dependent upon legislative funding support.

- All ten Designated Agencies offer clinic, home and community-based services. If needed, they refer internally or externally to higher levels of care. Flexibility for providing services at the right time and in the right amount has been supported by payment reform which began on January 1, 2019.
- DMH sponsors trainings for Designated and Specialized Service Agency staff to enhance the delivery of best practice and evidence-based treatments for children presenting with a range of different types of emotional-behavioral challenges.
- The Department is collaborating with VT Department of Health, UVM VT Child Health Improvement Program (VCHIP) and various stakeholders throughout the state who are currently engaged in projects that integrate mental health services within primary care settings toward the goal of identifying models of care that could most effectively and economically be expanded on a statewide level.
- Within schools, a variety of supports exist to promote healthy social-emotional development for all students, identify and provide support for students at risk, and provide intervention for those students with identified mental health needs. Educational supports and initiatives that address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students include Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) or other Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Individualized Education Plans and 504 Plans to protect modifications to learning environment and supports, and Educational Support Teams (EST). Schools and districts address the mental health needs of their students through different structures, some hire mental health professionals directly, some contract with their local designated mental health agency, some offer space for a private clinician. Depending on the structure, different supports may or may not be available. Mental health services provided by Designated Agencies in schools may include school-based clinical services, behavioral intervention programs, and other mental health or behavioral consultation and training for school staff. School mental health providers are typically involved in the educational support systems, helping to inform PBIS/MTSS activities, providing services and consultation with IEPs/504 plans/ ESTs. School mental health services can include mental health screenings, case management services, supportive counseling for skill development, individual and group therapy, consultation by a mental health professional on school-wide efforts as well as individual student plans.
- DMH provides funding for peer support organization for children and families – the Vermont Federation of Families for Mental Health and Vermont Family Network (both of whom are a part of the State Interagency Team) – which are run by and for people who have experienced mental health needs or have parented children with mental health needs. These organizations provide services including community outreach, support groups, local peer-run initiatives, education, advocacy, and pre-crisis telephone-based support, referral and emotional support.

The graphic below represents the array of supports in the child, youth and family mental health system of care across promotion and prevention activities, early intervention, and intensive intervention as well as the key partners in that system.



For additional information about the Mental Health System of Care the following reports can be accessed:

- [Annual Children's System of Care Report created by State Interagency Team](#)
- [Vision 2030: A Ten-Year Plan for an Integrated and Holistic System of Care](#)
- [Act 79 Reforming Vermont's Mental Health System: Report to the Legislature on the Implementation of Act 79](#)