

Mental Health Study

Overview of the 2007-08 Interim Study of the Publicly Funded System

Prepared for the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee
November 2009

Background

During its May 2007 special session, the Legislature appropriated \$200,000 for an interim study of Montana's publicly funded mental health system. The appropriation did not include specific instructions on use of the funds, so the Legislative Council turned to Senate Joint Resolution 27 from the regular session in considering how to use the money.

SJR 27 proposed a broad study "to evaluate the public mental health services available to Montanans in order to transform those services into a comprehensive, statewide public mental health system." The resolution also called for a review of all public funding sources to "determine how the state can maximize federal resources and funding opportunities."

In September 2007, the Legislative Council assigned the study to the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee and recommended that a consulting firm be hired to carry it out. The Children and Families Committee issued a Request for Proposals in November 2007. The RFP was modeled largely on the elements of SJR 27. Seven firms submitted proposals, and the Committee awarded a contract in January 2008 to DMA Health Strategies of Massachusetts.

Study Goals

The Request for Proposals outlined the following tasks for the study:

- an assessment of the mental health needs of Montanans, along with an inventory of existing services to identify gaps in services;
- an identification of the federal, state, and local funds spent on mental health services and of additional resources that may be available to the publicly funded system;
- an evaluation of the quality and appropriateness of Montana's existing publicly funded mental health services; and
- recommendations for policy considerations and funding options.

The consultant also was to provide information, as available, to assist with the Law and Justice Interim Committee studies of mental health issues as they related to people involved in the justice system.

Study Process

Staff members from DMA Health Strategies visited Montana six times during the study period to collect data, conduct interviews, and update the Children and Families Committee on study efforts. During the study period, the company:

- obtained and analyzed extensive data from state agencies on the use of publicly funded mental health services, the number of mental health providers, and the prevalence of mental health problems;
- interviewed representatives of state agencies, consumer organizations, and local and regional mental health planning groups; and
- conducted a Web-based survey that resulted in more than 700 responses from stakeholders throughout Montana.

Final Action

DMA presented its final report to the Committee at an Oct. 14, 2008, meeting. The Committee had authorized a special meeting to be held after the Sept. 15 end of the interim, in order to give DMA as much time as possible to conduct its analysis.

The study resulted in a 144-page report that contained nearly 100 recommendations. It also provided detailed information on available mental health services by region and county and on the availability of mental health providers, among other items.

Because of the short amount of time between completion of the report and the final meeting, Presiding Officer Edith Clark asked Committee members and the Department of Public Health and Human Services to review a limited number of recommendations. (See attached lists.) At the final meeting, the Committee approved drafting of legislation to:

- fund existing and new Kids Management Authorities (KMAs) and make other funds available for children's mental health needs;
- clarify existing laws relating to local and regional mental health advisory groups; and
- request an interim study for creating a managed care mental health system operated by a "care coordination organization."

Four Committee bills were introduced. None passed, but House Bill 645 – related to the federal stimulus funds – did contain \$667,000 for the current two-year budget period to fund existing KMAs and sustain the system of care for children with mental health needs.

The Committee also sent letters to DPHHS and the Department of Corrections, asking them to follow up on several specific items with the 2009 Legislature and with future interim committees. (See attached letters.) Committee members wanted to ensure that the report's recommendations were considered and pursued over a period of time. They recognized that many of the suggestions needed further review before policymakers could determine the best way to put them into effect.