

MEADOWS  
MENTAL HEALTH  
POLICY INSTITUTE

AUSTIN – Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute President and CEO Andy Keller, PhD, presented invited testimony to the Texas House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Article II, Thursday morning about the significant mental health impacts of COVID-19. He also addressed the importance of building on the state’s investments over the last several years to further improve care and address the growing mental health needs, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing and unprecedented event, and we will be dealing with the trauma it is causing, physically, financially and emotionally for years to come,” Keller said. “Now, more than ever, we must protect and build upon the investments the Texas Legislature and communities across the state have made in mental health care.”

Among the recommendations made were:

- Extending Medicaid reimbursement of behavioral health services delivered via telemedicine, telehealth, or telephone.
- Implementing the [Collaborative Care Model](#) to treat mental health concerns earlier and more effectively in primary care settings.
- Committing to investment in Phase III of the State Hospital System Redesign.
- Continue scaling up the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium (TCMHCC).

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission began authorizing telehealth Medicaid payments for some behavioral health services in March 2020, greatly expanding access to people in underserved areas. House Bill 4, introduced by Representative Four Price, would ensure permanent access for these services.

The Collaborative Care Model (CoCM) is a proven, team-based approach to detecting and treating mental illness in primary care. The Meadows Institute finds that full access to the CoCM model would greatly reduce deaths from suicide and overdose, and research clearly demonstrates that it would save an estimated \$15 billion in Medicaid savings nationally if only 20 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries with depression used it.

“Improvements in outcomes for cancer and heart disease were driven by data to detect needs early and measure progress reliably. Using the same approach through collaborative care for mental health will drastically improve treatments and outcomes,” Keller said. “Making that available through Medicaid is just one step the state can take to help Texans get the care they need, when they need it.”

The State Hospital System Redesign reflects a total redesign of state hospital systems, both in terms of the physical structures and how care is provided, from intake, through discharge, and beyond. It is crucial to Texans with more severe needs who too often languish in our jails and emergency rooms.

The TCMHCC is critical to early intervention in mental health issues and the overall wellness of Texas children. The Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), which provides free consultation to primary care providers treating children with mental health issues, saw a 62% increase in provider calls in October 2020 and 40% more in November. The Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) initiative, which provides telemedicine and telehealth access to school districts for students facing mental health-related issues, covers more than 1,100 schools and 1.5 million Texas students.

Starting in April 2020, the Meadows Institute issued a series of white papers analyzing the mental health impact of the pandemic on individuals across the country, including the effects of economic recession on rates of death from suicide and substance overdose. The report found that for every five-percentage point annual increase in the unemployment rate, an additional 300 lives could be lost to suicide each year in Texas, and more than 4,000 nationwide. The white papers series can be found [here](#).

More information can be found at [www.mmhpi.org](http://www.mmhpi.org).

### **About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute**

Launched in 2014, the Meadows Institute helps Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local leaders identify equitable systemic solutions to mental health needs, and has become Texas's most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy. The Meadows Institute has begun to make a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas leaders expand the mental health workforce, improve access to care for veterans and their families, shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. Learn more at [mmhpi.org](http://mmhpi.org).