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May 2, 2023

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Pediatric Mental Health Initiative from Children’s Health and Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute Expands Access to Behavioral Health Services for 150,000 Families in Inaugural Year

Organizations share impressive results from first training program to address the pediatric mental health crisis and support pediatric providers

DALLAS – A new pediatric mental health initiative launched by [Children’s Health](#), one of the largest and most prestigious pediatric health care providers in the country and the leading pediatric health care system in North Texas, and the [Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute](#), a nationally recognized non-partisan policy and research organization, is reporting significant progress in its first year. The program, which was developed to address the mental health epidemic adolescents are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis warnings sounded by the U.S. Surgeon General, provided key training and resources to 75 area providers in its inaugural year, who collectively treat nearly 150,000 area children and families.

While pediatric emotional and behavioral health challenges were a growing concern before the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and adolescents have become a public health crisis. In 2020, emergency rooms saw a 24% increase in mental health-related visits for children ages 5-11, and a 31% increase for older children.

Children’s Health and the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute launched a pediatric mental health initiative in 2022 to provide a more proactive approach to diagnosing and treating pediatric mental health care and are sharing findings and best practices from the initiative’s first year.

The pediatric mental health initiative trains pediatric providers to detect and treat mild to moderate behavioral health conditions in the primary care setting, such as anxiety, stress and depression, so providers can address issues before they escalate to a crisis point. Nearly 80 percent of pediatric mental health conditions are mild-to-moderate and can be effectively treated in primary care settings when physicians have the proper tools and support.

In its first year, this initiative has empowered pediatric primary care providers who care for more than 150,000 families, by providing them with training and resources to shift the focus of mental health care treatment to early intervention.

“We simply cannot afford to experience a delay in care. Through this initiative, we’ve empowered 75 pediatric providers in our first year to build upon their expertise to identify and treat a wider range of mental health diagnoses, shortening the amount of time to begin treatment.”

Data collected from participants indicate that providers increased their use of mental health screening tools, billing codes for behavioral health integration, and available clinical consultation as needed from the [Child Psychiatry Access Network](#). These changes allowed them to effectively assess and treat a wider range of mental health diagnoses.

“This initiative has equipped providers to identify and meet the most pressing needs of their patients before it escalates to a crisis,” said Dr. Mia Best, pediatrician at Children’s Health.

“Ultimately, this allows more families to place trust in their health care team to provide a comprehensive approach to care through enhanced screening, communication and coordination, addressing their concerns in a timely manner and allowing for early intervention.”

Due to the significant achievements of the pilot program, the initiative has already expanded to engage more providers. Additional results include:

- Increased provider confidence in their ability to evaluate and diagnose specific psychological conditions, improved billing strategies for behavioral health visits, and expanded ability to use tools that can identify early stages of depression and anxiety among their patients.
- Extremely high levels of provider-reported value from the program, with more than 85% of participants reporting they would recommend the program to other providers.
- Development and implementation of formal evaluation tools and measures that demonstrate positive results and areas for future focus.
- Serves as an effective model to promote the broad adoption and optimization of collaborative care billing models through Medicaid that will support the integration of mental health screening and care in primary pediatric practice.

The core of the pediatric mental health initiative are trainings offered online and in-person at a Children’s Health primary care clinic, the first in the nation to serve as a learning laboratory and best-in-class provider of pediatric integrated care. The center, which has been temporarily housed at Children’s Health Specialty Center DeSoto, will eventually move to its permanent location at the Reimagine RedBird development, where there will be training and consultation available for community pediatricians as well as evaluation and treatment for patients requiring specialty care.

“What makes initiatives like this so important is the fact that mental illness is a pediatric disease, with 50% of most illnesses emerging by age 14, so this initiative provides an essential path forward for pediatricians, children and their families,” said Andy Keller, president and chief executive officer of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

"We have already seen a huge impact in the lives of hundreds of North Texas families and look forward to the future of this initiative as they continue to provide better, more accessible mental healthcare to young people and their families."

About Children's HealthSM

[Children's HealthSM](#) is committed to making life better for children. As one of the largest and most prestigious pediatric health care providers in the country and the leading pediatric health care system in North Texas, Children's Health cares for children through more than 750,000 patient visits annually. The Children's Health system includes its flagship hospital, Children's Medical Center Dallas, as well as Children's Medical Center Plano, the Children's Health Care Network, specialty centers, rehabilitation facilities and physician services.

Children's Medical Center Dallas continues to be the only North Texas hospital to be ranked in 10 out of 10 pediatric specialties by U.S. News & World Report. Through its academic affiliation with UT Southwestern Medical Center, Children's Health is a leader in life-changing treatments, innovative technology and ground-breaking research. This affiliation led to establishing the Children's Medical Center Research Institute in 2011, committed to pursuing research in regenerative medicine, cancer biology and metabolism. For more information, follow Children's Health on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), or visit [Childrens.com](#).

About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Launched in 2014, the Meadows Institute helps legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local, state, and national 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 is making a significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas and national leaders shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, addressing the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms, and helping all people with mental health needs recover and be well. Learn more at [mmhpi.org](#).