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Specialized Therapy Team Launches to Support At-Risk Youth in Uvalde, Comal, and Hays Counties

NEW BRAUNFELS – A specialized response team was introduced today to support at-risk youth in need of intensive assistance in Uvalde, Comal, and Hays Counties. The new [Multisystemic Therapy \(MST\)](#) team was funded as part of the [state’s initial \\$105.5 million response](#) to the Uvalde tragedy, which included \$4.7 million to fund seven new MST teams across the state.

MST is a proven family- and community-based treatment for at-risk youth aged 12 to 17 with intensive needs. It has proven most effective for treating youth who have committed or are at risk of committing violent offenses, have serious mental health or substance abuse concerns, are at risk of out-of-home placement, and have experienced abuse and neglect. It is the only evidence-based treatment that has been shown to reduce violent crime among adolescents, bringing rates down by as much as 75%.

The program is a collaborative effort between the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and the Hill Country Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (MHDD) Centers.

“This is a direct benefit of the state’s efforts to help troubled young people and families following last year’s tragedy at Robb Elementary,” said Tod Citron, Hill Country MHDD CEO. “MST is an outstanding community-based service that utilizes a holistic approach for at-risk youth. This service gives young people and their families opportunities to change their lives and disrupt negative behaviors.”

The MST program includes a team of specially trained therapists who provide intensive treatment, usually in the home, while focusing heavily on the involvement of parents and other caregivers. Team members remain on-call and available 24 hours a day and help the young person develop necessary skills to cope with family, school, and neighborhood stressors, with structured supervision and quality assurances to ensure progress is being made and maintained. A team consists of one supervisor and three or four therapists, with each therapist serving clients in various counties in their catchment areas.

The average treatment duration ranges from three to five months, during which therapists and provider agencies address the underlying causes of delinquent and antisocial behavior.

“When Uvalde happened, we knew Texas had to do more to reach at-risk youth. State leadership took immediate steps to invest in much-needed mental health and school safety initiatives, recognizing the importance of early intervention and evidence-based programs,” said Andy Keller, President and CEO of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, which helped implement plans for expanding MST in Texas. “MST has been proven to have a long-term impact, with positive outcomes. By keeping young people in their homes and including family members and other caregivers as a key part of treatment, this model helps turn lives around before they get caught up in cycles of crisis, violence, and arrest.”

In addition to its singular capacity to reduce future violence, the scientific literature clearly shows the effectiveness of MST, with 9 out of 10 young people served still living at home, in school or working, and avoiding follow-up arrests. Further, by keeping youth out of juvenile detention or hospitals, MST returns \$23.59 for every dollar invested in treatment.

Building on the previously existing teams based in Harris, El Paso, and Nueces Counties, the seven new teams funded in July 2022 bring the state’s total number to 14. The 88th Legislature recently appropriated a total of \$32.45 million to maintain and expand MST capacity by an estimated 15 additional teams starting later this year.

The seven new MST teams include:

[Hill Country MHDD](#) (Uvalde, Comal, Hays Counties)

[Bluebonnet Trails Community Services](#) (Guadalupe, Caldwell, and Gonzales Counties)

[Denton MHMR](#) (Denton County)

[LifePath Systems](#) (Collin County)

[North Texas Behavioral Health Authority](#) (Ellis County)

[Star Care Specialty Care](#) (Lubbock County)

[Tropical Texas Behavioral Health](#) (Hidalgo County)

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About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Launched in 2014, the Meadows Institute helps Texas 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.

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