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Nonprofit Alliance Receives Grant from Hogg Foundation to Transform Behavioral Health Services in Harris County

AUSTIN – [The Harris County Healthcare Alliance](#) was awarded an \$87,874 grant from the [Hogg Foundation for Mental Health](#) to transform the region’s behavioral health care system and improve services for more than one million uninsured county residents.

The alliance is one of six Texas-based organizations that received a total of \$456,565 in grants from the Hogg Foundation in November. The foundation awarded the grants to support timely, meaningful projects that address key issues related to mental health and are likely to improve mental health policies affecting Texas residents.

“The foundation is continuing our longstanding practice of funding projects to address important and relevant mental health issues that directly affect the people of Texas,” said Dr. Octavio N. Martinez Jr., executive director of the foundation. “The grants also will help build interest in and capacity for mental health policy research and development work among nonprofit agencies, academic institutions and government agencies in Texas.”

The current Harris County system is in crisis, according to the alliance, with a widening gap between the need for and availability of mental health services. An estimated 540,000 county residents have a mental health condition, as does 55 percent of the county’s homeless population of 12,000 to 14,000, and 24 percent of county jail inmates – about 2,880 people at any point in time. One-third of the county’s 3.6 million residents have no health insurance.

As a result, the county’s behavioral health services are overwhelmed, with inadequate bed capacity for psychiatric patients, overuse of emergency facilities for behavioral health problems, and a disproportionate and growing number of inmates with mental health conditions.

“The factors creating our complex and fragmented behavioral health system didn’t manifest themselves overnight, and it will take a long, concerted and collaborative effort to

address the problems. The foundation's grant enables us to begin this important work on a strong footing," said Karen Love, executive director of the alliance.

Local public officials, service provider agencies and consumer advocacy groups have agreed to collaborate with the 46-member alliance on the project, which aims to transform the region's fragmented behavioral health services into a recovery-oriented system that is closely coordinated with the county's primary care services.

The project will begin with an analysis of existing data and studies dating back to 1985 that address the county's behavioral health system. The group will use the data to create a comprehensive map of the current system that locates services and identifies gaps and funding streams. The group then will develop a policy paper and presentation for a leadership summit, at which key decision makers will be asked to adopt policy objectives and commit resources and support for the next two phases of the project, Love said.

Potential policy actions resulting from the first phase of the project could include legislative proposals and recommendations to the Harris County Commissioners Court to increase or redirect funding for services, higher education strategies to ensure a qualified and culturally competent mental health workforce, and demonstration of return on investment from adopting innovative approaches to behavioral health care, according to Love.

"Our health care system is fragmented and in crisis. A comprehensive analysis is needed to identify shortcomings and formulate solutions, Martinez said. "The grant will help the alliance achieve this goal and improve mental health care in Harris County."

The Hogg Foundation was founded in 1940 by Miss Ima Hogg, daughter of former Texas Governor James Stephen Hogg, to promote improved mental health for the people of Texas. The foundation's grants and programs support mental health consumer services, research, policy analysis and public education projects in Texas. The foundation is part of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin.

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