

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

An Organization Dedicated to Improving the Lives of Kansans with Mental Illnesses

Testimony presented to the House Social Services Budget Committee on
the Adult Continuum of Care Committee Report – July 2015

Amy A. Campbell – March 15, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition (KMHC).

KMHC Endorses Adult Continuum of Care Committee Report

The Adult Continuum of Care Committee Report of July 2015 puts a finer point on the issue that many Kansas families already know – the Kansas mental health system is scrambling to meet the needs of Kansans with mental illness and substance use disorders. The Kansas Mental Health Coalition endorses the 43 page report, and hopes the strategies suggested in the report will help the Department on Aging and Disability Services to build on its recent work – bringing together Kansas City area stakeholders to form Rainbow Services Inc. and providing grant funds to Sedgwick County to create crisis services there. There is more to be done.

Last summer, the further reduction of state mental health hospital beds made the gaps in our continuum of care obvious. The State and the community mental health centers partnered to respond to the growing need, but financial and staff resources are in short supply. The lack of appropriate, more intensive treatment options at the community level for people needing a higher level of treatment or a step down from hospitalization has been a barrier. Where you live determines your opportunities for recovery, and even in the Kansas City region it is uncertain whether the model crisis and referral program at Rainbow is sustainable. As stated in the report: “An underfunded system is challenged to meet the basic needs of people with severe mental illness, let alone develop evidenced based practices, enhance existing services, or create needed alternatives of care.”

We hope the Report will stimulate broader support for further community level investments and strategies targeted to improving the continuum. The Report advocates expanding access to crisis services, residential programs, housing and peer programs, in addition to boosting community based outpatient programs. The Committee also encourages improved transitions between facilities and communities, with treatment provided while people await admissions and after discharge.

The Committee recommended short term goals: Kansas should apply for federal resources such as the Excellence in Mental Health Act, endorse change to the federal IMD Exclusion that prevents Medicaid reimbursement for some residential psychiatric treatment, and re-open the 60 beds at Osawatomie State Hospital as soon as practically possible. (The beds are currently unavailable while safety repairs are made.)

For the long term: ***“Develop a multi-faceted approach to develop a regional service array to better meet the needs of persons with behavioral health disorders outside of the state mental health hospitals. This would allow the hospitals to focus on specialized inpatient psychiatric services consistent with tertiary care hospitals.”***

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is prepared to advocate for action to expand access to quality treatment for more Kansans. One thing is certain, when we do not treat persons with mental illness, communities pay the price. Individuals pay the price. People are all too often caught in an unending cycle of repeated hospitalizations or incarceration and the costs are more than fiscal, they include broken families, broken people and the loss of life itself.

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with Mental Illnesses and Severe Emotional Disorders. We are consumer and family advocates, provider associations, direct services providers, pharmaceutical companies and others who share a common mission. At monthly roundtable meetings, participants develop and track a consensus agenda that provides the basis for legislative advocacy efforts each year. This format enables many groups, that would otherwise be unable to participate in the policy making process, to have a voice in public policy matters that directly affect the lives of their constituencies. The opportunity for dialogue and the development of consensus makes all of us stronger and more effective in achieving our mission.