Improving Emergency Care for Behavioral Health Crises

A behavioral health crisis is when a person struggles to cope with their emotions, impulses, or actions. They may think or talk about hurting themselves or others. The person may feel overwhelming hopelessness, helplessness, or sadness. They may see or hear things other people don’t. They may overuse alcohol or drugs. In these situations, the person needs help fast.

People in crisis often turn to a hospital emergency department for help. But medical personnel sometimes struggle to treat people with mental illness, substance use disorders, or intellectual and developmental disabilities. The result is typically a long, expensive, and ineffective stay for the person in need.

That’s why Partners sponsors Behavioral Health Walk-In Centers and Integrated Care Centers in Burke, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, and Lincoln counties.

All we have ever wanted is to get patients to the right place to get the treatment they need,” said Kimberly Green, Lincoln County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Deputy Director. “It was frustrating, as a medical care provider to see someone needing help and not get the services they need. This has been a wonderful opportunity for EMS. We are enabled with training and resources to get people the different kind of help they need, instead of letting them sit in the emergency department.

Partners’ Behavioral Health Walk-In Centers

The walk-in centers, funded through Partners and its community partners, serve as behavioral health versions of hospital emergency departments. These centers are open to any resident needing help with a behavioral health crisis. In addition, law enforcement officers and EMS agency personnel are encouraged to bring people to the centers.

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Partners’ Behavioral Health Walk-In Centers

1. **Cleveland Crisis & Recovery Center:** In 2011, Partners and Phoenix Counseling Center opened a 16-bed locked Facility-Based Crisis program in Cleveland County. Sharing a wall with this facility is an evaluation center with law enforcement, peer support, nursing, and clinical staff.

   **Results:**
   - Cleveland County has fallen from one of the highest rates of behavioral health use of the emergency department to the lowest in the entire Carolinas Healthcare System; less than 2% of its emergency department use was primarily for behavioral health reasons.
   - The center treats an average of 50 people per month and less than 5% are transferred to an emergency room or referred to inpatient hospitalization.

2. **Lincoln Wellness Center:** Partners helped open the Lincoln Wellness Center in 2014. Off-duty, Crisis Intervention Team-trained law enforcement officers are onsite until midnight each weeknight. They allow safe drop off for those transporting people under legal paperwork and to help ensure staff safety during extended hours.

   **Results:**
   - In the first year of operation, the Lincoln Wellness Center achieved a 29% emergency department diversion rate.
   - For less than $21,000, Lincoln County was able to voluntarily divert 111 behavioral health patients away from emergency department treatment.

3. **Burke Integrated Health:** In 2015, Partners helped open Burke Integrated Health. This location offers coordinated and integrated physical and behavioral health care. Services include acute primary medical care, behavioral health crisis services, substance use disorder treatments, therapy, skills and employment training, evaluations and assessments, and referrals to off-site service providers.

   **Results:**
   - Emergency department visits were reduced by 29% from May 2015 to May 2016 in Burke County, according to a December 2016 Community Care of North Carolina (CCNC) report.
   - In FY16, 27% of new visitors would have gone to the emergency room without Burke Integrated Health.

4. **Ollie Harris Behavioral Health Center:** In 2016, Partners helped open this walk-in center in Cleveland County. The center is attached to the Cleveland County Public Health Center and provides a safe place for individuals, families, and children in need of treatment for mental health or substance use issues.

   **Results:**
   - In FY16, 67% of new visitors would have gone to the emergency room without the Ollie Harris Behavioral Health Center.

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Two New Centers Open in 2017

Partners opened the new **Gaston Complete Health** center in Gaston County and the new **Impact Health of Iredell** center in Iredell County in 2017. Both facilities serve as Integrated Care Centers supporting Partners’ innovative Whole Person Integrated Care model. Learn more at [www.PartnersWPIC.org](http://www.PartnersWPIC.org).

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