



Partners served more, increased providers

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RUTHERFORDTON — In its first year as Rutherford County’s Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO), Partners Behavioral Health has served more clients and engaged the community in a more robust manner. The company gave its first-year report to Rutherford County Commissioners at their meeting Monday evening.

Commissioners voted to disengage the county from the Vaya and realign with Partners in April 2018. After lobbying officials in Raleigh, the county received final approval at the end of 2018, and worked for the next six months for a smooth transition. On July 1, 2019, Partners become the county’s LME/MCO.

These organizations are entities that manage county, state, and Medicaid funds for mental health, intellectual and developmental disability and substance abuse services. LME/MCOs such as Partners and Vaya, which serve multiple counties, do not typically provide treatment services directly. They ensure those who need treatment are able to do so through a network of providers who contract with the LME/MCO.

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In making the decision to change LME/MCOs, county leaders said they wanted better overall services and more engagement. July marked one year with Partners, and officials on Monday appeared pleased.

A total of 3,201 members were served during the first year. The rate of those enrolled in Medicaid, who received services increased from 6.9% to 15.8%. More than 170 calls from individuals were received through the access to care line.

Partners is contracted with 206 providers to serve Rutherford County members; 22 of the providers are located in Rutherford County. New services were added by 15 providers since July 2019.

“I want to thank Partners,” said Steve Garrison, Rutherford County manager. “Now, we have a seat at the table. Rutherford County is represented.”

He was referring to the fact that with Partners, Rutherford County Commissioners designate a representative to serve on the Partners Board of Directors, which was not the case previously with Vaya. Garrison currently serves as the county appointee.

Garrison also noted that with Partners, Rutherford County has greater input as to how certain funds are disbursed.

All N.C. counties are required to appropriate a set amount of county funds to their LME/MCO defined as their “maintenance of efforts” appropriation. For Rutherford County, this amount is \$102,168.

“Partners works with the county to solicit input from key community stakeholders, such as the sheriff’s office, Foothills Heath District, United Way, Community Health Council, and Rutherford County Department of Social Services, to determine where these funds are expended to the benefit of Rutherford County citizens,” Garrison said. “Currently these funds are appropriated for detention center mental health and substance addiction support

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services, mental health/substance addiction grant writing and support services, substance addiction peer support services and more.”

Bryan King, county commission chairman, said he is also impressed with the work of Partners.

“The Partners presentation of their first year serving the citizens of Rutherford County was impressive,” said King. “The investment of over \$25,632,000, (total amount expensed for the year), and the news of an increase in providers, and an increase in citizens served was welcomed news. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Partners to improving lives and strengthening our community.”