

Lackawanna-Susquehanna Behavioral Health/Intellectual Disabilities/Early Intervention Program



Program Accomplishments 2021

I. Overview

The Lackawanna-Susquehanna Behavioral Health/Intellectual Disabilities/Early Intervention Program is pleased to present a summary of Program Accomplishments achieved in 2021.

In the face of many challenges, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the workforce staffing crisis, the Program continues collaborate with our contracted providers and Health Choices partners to provide comprehensive behavioral health, intellectual disability, and early intervention services in support of our mission: *to connect consumer satisfaction, outcome evaluation and accountability with the planning, procurement and the efficient management of effective services and supports.*

We are pleased to highlight areas of accomplishment for 2021 that we believe reflect our hard work and commitment to the residents of Lackawanna and Susquehanna Counties.

II. Administration and Fiscal

❖ **Supporting Providers through Bridge Payment Funding**

The Program supported Community Mental Health Centers through an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA). APA payments are available when approved by the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) and are designed to:

- Offer providers financial support to stabilize the workforce (pay/preserve essential behavioral health direct care staff); and
- continue to provide individuals with access to essential mental health services and help people manage other social needs.

III. Behavioral Health

❖ **Restructuring Crisis**

The Program applied for and received three grants to restructure the delivery of crisis services in the Joinder; Medical Mobile Crisis; Crisis Co-Responder Team and GPS Dispatch.

Medical Mobile Crisis Team will respond to crisis calls for both Lackawanna and Susquehanna Counties and will be dispatched via telephone crisis using GPS enabled dispatch. The Medical Mobile Crisis team will have the ability to administer and/or prescribe medication that may be

necessary to stabilize the current crisis and avert trips to the hospital emergency department and/or utilization of ambulance and other emergency services. Historically crisis services delivered in hospital emergency departments and/or involvement of ambulance and other emergency responders typically result in referral to inpatient hospitalization and other higher levels of care. At times engaging emergency services may also lead to criminal justice involvement and incarceration. The medical mobile crisis team will support individuals in the least restrictive environment.

Crisis Co-Responder Teams (C-CRT) will support law enforcement responding to individuals in mental health crisis. Each team will consist of a law enforcement officer with Crisis Intervention Training and a mental health clinician who will respond together to address mental health calls. One team will be needed to support the city of Scranton Police Department and another team will be available to support other smaller community police departments and to support rural Susquehanna County. The C-CRT will provide law enforcement officers with the resources they need to safely and effectively, respond to calls involving individuals in mental health crisis, and provide on scene crisis de-escalation, screening, assessment, and referral to ongoing mental health treatment and other community-based services. We believe that this C-CRT model in addition to our Medical Mobile Crisis team will further reduce emergency room visits, inpatient hospitalization, arrest, or other criminal justice involvement, and will stabilize situations that may lead to domestic violence and other abusive situations.

GPS Dispatch/GPS enabled technology will manage Mobile Crisis, Medical Mobile Crisis, and Crisis Co-Responder Teams to dispatch resources safely and effectively and provide data on response times and crisis contact duration. This technology will also allow for collaboration with Lackawanna and Susquehanna County 911 Centers to support law enforcement, resolve mental health crisis in the community and avoid criminal justice involvement. The data from the performance dashboards can be shared with county commissioners, legislators, community partners and other stakeholders to build confidence in our ability to support the mental health needs of our community.

❖ **Susquehanna County Mental Health Center**

The Lackawanna-Susquehanna BH/ID/EI Program developed a plan to open a psychiatric Outpatient Mental Health Center in Susquehanna County. This mental health center will meet the increased needs of the residents of Susquehanna County, and will have the following outcomes:

- Reduce or eliminate transportation as a barrier to accessing mental health services;
- Enhance the availability of psychiatric services for the residents in Susquehanna County;
- Enhance the continuum of care by providing case management and peer support;
- Create partnerships with physical health, criminal justice, and other social service partners in the county to develop a cross system, integrated whole person approach to service delivery; and
- Reduce crisis encounters and the need for inpatient and more restrictive levels of care.

IV. Intellectual Disabilities

❖ **Supporting Providers**

Locally the Direct Support Professional Workforce staffing crisis is critically impacting the ability to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities safely in their homes and communities. In an effort to confront this crisis locally, the Program hosted a Round Table discussion in September 2021 to address staff recruitment and retention issues with members of executive leadership

from local Intellectual and Developmental Disability providers. This dialogue provided an opportunity for the Program to gain feedback from the provider network regarding the staffing crisis, group home closures, and other difficulties resulting from and related to the pandemic. Additionally, it identified specific action items that could offer relief. The Program continues to seek opportunities to have meaningful dialogue with both the provider network and community stakeholders to develop local solutions to this crisis with a goal of stabilizing workforce issuing while ensuring quality service delivery.

❖ **Specialized Training**

The Program, through the Quality Management (QM) plan, identified the need for additional behavior support training for the local provider network. In response, we hosted two trainings conducted by subject matter experts in October and November 2021. Training topics included Understanding Mental Health, Crisis De-Escalation, IDD Coaching, and Validation; topics covered were rooted in trauma informed care. Targeted learning objectives were understanding behavioral health presentation along with strategies to de-escalate someone who is in crisis and hopefully circumvent a critical situation moving forward; rapport building strategies and thoughtful approaches to working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; enhancing the quality of behavior supports; and reducing use of emergency services.

❖ **ADOS-Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule & The Independent Eligibility Team**

The Program purchased the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) in 2021 to respond to the expansion of eligibility of Office of Developmental Programs services to individuals with an exclusive diagnosis of Autism. The ADOS is a reliable, standardized, and normed assessment instrument that is used to assess and diagnose autism spectrum disorders for individuals aged 12 months and older. In November 2021, a Psychologist from the Independent Eligibility Team conducted the first two ADOS assessments. Moving forward, this tool will ensure that the Independent Eligibility team has the capacity to offer eligibility determination equitably to individuals with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder.

V. Early Intervention

❖ **Coaching**

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning is supporting *Coaching* as a methodology of intervention. Coaching is a relationship-based process led by a professional with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills. It is designed to promote sustainable growth in knowledge, skills, and behaviors for the caregivers of infants and toddlers receiving Early Intervention services.

Coaching Supports and Services enhance a child's growth and development and utilize a set of core principles that ensures services are evidence-based, individualized, and embedded in meaningful and functional outcomes, while working collaboratively with the families, caregivers, and ECE professionals. The focus when coaching a parent is observation, instruction, and reflection so professionals, families and caregivers can use evidence-based practices for the development of young children in everyday activities and routines.

The Lackawanna Susquehanna BHIDEI Program began the implementation of Coaching in February 2021 and will continue implementation throughout 2022.