



Testimony to House Committee on Health and Human Services on House Bill 2319

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Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler, I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association appreciates the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of House Bill 2319 that would allow for Medicaid expansion in Kansas through the KanCare program.

The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties in Kansas, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. Just as community hospitals cannot refuse treatment to persons in their emergency rooms, CMHCs cannot refuse treatment to persons in need of mental health treatment. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the "safety net" for Kansans with mental health needs, collectively serving over 120,000 Kansans.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) includes the option for a significant expansion of KanCare that would positively impact Kansans with mental illness. In Kansas, more than half of those who present for treatment at CMHCs have no insurance. Additionally, we know that of those served by the CMHC system who are non-Medicaid, 69 percent earn less than \$20,000 a year. KanCare expansion would allow these individuals who need care to get the treatment they need.

Without treatment, these individuals will decompensate, and may end up in jails, emergency rooms or state hospitals, all of which are much more expensive than community based services. We have a unique opportunity to help thousands of Kansans with mental illness get access to early, effective treatments. Expanding KanCare under House Bill 2319 will help these vulnerable individuals get access to the treatment they need and before it is too late.

Significant economic benefits would be achieved if Kansas were to expand KanCare. According to a recent study commissioned by the Kansas Hospital Association, the expansion of KanCare would enable the State to increase employment not only in the health care sector, but also across other sectors of the Kansas economy.

Additional economic benefits will follow as well. In a recent study commissioned by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, it was found that behavioral health treatment has an economic return on investment of \$7 for every \$1 spent as a result of increased productivity, reduced healthcare, criminal justice, and social service costs.

The Association would urge the legislature to expand KanCare. If and when a common sense Kansas solution can be developed to serve Kansans, expansion would contribute to healthier families and healthier communities across our great state. We appreciate the committee giving strong consideration to this very important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.