



## Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc.

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### **Testimony to House Appropriations Subcommittee on Contract Nursing**

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Chair Mason 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 represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 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. 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.

Kansas is experiencing a workforce crisis across all sectors of healthcare. This shortage is predicted to continue or increase with the aging of our population.

Implementation of the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model in Kansas has resulted in an increased ability to recruit and retain staff within the community mental health system. From 2021 (pre-CCBHC implementation) to 2023 (a majority of CMHCs certified as CCBHCs), there has been a 100% increase in the number of CNAs, a 44% increase in the number of LPNs, a 79% increase in the number of RNs, and a 43% increase in the number of APRNs employed by CMHCs.

However, the demand for services and need for staffing continues to grow and the need extends beyond the community mental health system. To that end, we have recently partnered with approximately 15 education and provider organizations in the Wichita area to establish the first Kansas Behavioral Health Center of Excellence. The Center of Excellence is a coalition focused on developing strategies to provide timely access to high quality treatment and services, increasing training and education opportunities in behavioral health, and being an incubator for innovation. The Center is currently operating under the umbrella of the nonprofit, Community Behavioral Health (CBH), though the long-term vision is for it to become a self-sustaining, standalone organization.

Members of the Center of Excellence have developed a policy agenda focused on two

overarching principles: (1.) *develop and grow the behavioral health workforce, and (2.) reduce burdens to support the existing workforce.*

The Center of Excellence has only been formally established for a short time, and we had less than two months to develop a first year budget request based on information that we could gather quickly. However, this will be a long-term initiative focused on all professions providing behavioral health services, including but not limited to nurses and other medical staff, case managers, social workers, and counselors and therapists.

### **FY 2025 Budget Request—Phase I**

In FY 2025, we have requested \$5.4m through the KDADs budget to Community Behavioral Health to provide support for the following education and workforce measures:

- There is a scarcity of psychiatrists practicing in Kansas; even more so for those practicing in the specialty of child and adolescent psychiatry. To increase the number of practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists in our state, we propose an additional 15 residency/fellowship slots (three per year in a 5-year program) should be developed and funded at the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences. Funding would support the ongoing annual cost of 15 residency positions as well as the faculty and staff required for supervision and instruction. The first year cost for three residents is estimated to be \$3m.
- Kansas, and the Wichita region, continue to struggle with addressing the opioid crisis. Increasing the number of clinicians with specialized training in addiction medicine through an Addiction Medicine Fellowship program would help to fill this need. An Addiction Medicine Fellowship provides additional training and expertise in treatment of substance use disorders to any physicians who complete residency in any medical specialty. The training will focus on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of substance use disorders within a biopsychosocial framework that is developmentally, culturally and trauma informed, and recognizes the impact of substance use on both the individual and the family. The estimated annual costs for four fellows is \$1.1m.
- Expertise in forensic mental health is an emerging need, made even more pressing by the opening of the new regional mental health hospital. Development of a forensic psychology degree program, including support for faculty positions to include at least one full professorship estimated at \$200,000 and two fellow positions at \$180,000, for a total of \$380,000 annually.
- Paid internship and practicum opportunities help students gain needed experience and enter the workforce sooner. The estimated annual cost for six psychology internships is \$240,000 plus \$150,000 for supervision by a licensed psychologist for a total annual expense of \$390,000.
- Physician Associates (PAs) can play an integral part in the health care team. To increase the number of PAs in the behavioral health workforce, we recommend funding for three initiatives:
  - Funds to incentivize providers to precept students on behavioral health rotations. Each year, there are 48 students engaged in the program. Funding in the amount of \$48,000 (\$1,000 per student) annually would help to increase the number of providers willing to supervise students completing this specialty clinical rotation.

- Funds to start a WSU PA Post-Graduate Behavioral Health Fellowship. Several PA programs are partnered with a Healthcare system to provide a one-year post-graduate PA fellowship in BH medicine. Development of a WSU PA Program would provide additional training and expertise to PAs. Annual costs for a one additional faculty member and one staff person would be \$175,000.
- Funds to proceed with a WSU PA Program Doctorate Degree. This DMSc could have a behavioral health pathway or focus, again providing more PA providers to meet the BH needs of patients in Kansas. Annual costs for the program are estimated to be \$300,000 (2 additional faculty + 1 additional staff).

## **Phase II and Beyond**

Looking forward we have identified a couple of specific areas of focus for the near term. The first is related to nursing programs. Training and education for nursing students are available across the state at many of our technical and community colleges and universities. However, one significant challenge is recruitment of faculty to provide the instruction for these programs. Noncompetitive salaries for these in-demand faculty members makes it difficult to retain staff and meet the demand for training nursing students. Funding targeted for increasing nursing program faculty salaries is a critical need.

Second, there is a need to develop a well-defined career pathway for individuals interested in working in the behavioral health sector (similar to the nursing career ladder, e.g., CNA/CMA, to LPN, to RN or BSN, to APRN). A licensed behavioral health technician could be an entry level position into a behavioral health career ladder. These individuals could be employed at CMHCs, community or psychiatric hospitals, crisis centers, and so on. This position could be developed through a 2-year degree program offered at community and/or technical colleges and supported through licensing regulations as articulated by KDADs that would allow for hiring, salary setting, and identification of a career progression.

Moving forward, we will continue to work closely with our many partners in the Center of Excellence to focus on concrete strategies to address our healthcare workforce shortage.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today, and I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.