

Expanding behavioral health supports

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has recently received more than \$2 million through three different grant awards to increase and/or improve behavioral health supports and services to residents of Allegheny County.

An \$800,000 grant awarded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will help fund the Healthy Housing Outreach Program to expand services for those experiencing chronic homelessness in addition to a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or other behavioral health need. Beyond offering behavioral health assessments and supports, the program will link participants to peer supports who can assist with housing and other needs to help on the path to recovery. By removing barriers, the program will aid individuals with finding – and maintaining – permanent, stable housing.

A second SAMHSA grant of \$933,000 will increase behavioral health services for children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances (SED) and their families. Funding will establish a system of care within a new Community of Practice, a group of 28 behavioral health service providers and peer and advocacy groups who share a concern about children and families involved in the child welfare system. Through expanding supports; creating a standardized, trauma-informed approach to service delivery; and addressing gaps in crisis service, DHS will improve care for the nearly one-third of children in child welfare who are also receiving mental health services.

Both SAMHSA grants are guaranteed funding for one year, with the opportunity for renewed funding for additional years, depending on the availability of federal funds.

In addition to these federal fund awards, the PA Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services invited counties to apply for monies to implement or support programs for those experiencing a first episode of psychosis (FEP). Allegheny County submitted an application proposing projects from Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC and Family Services of Western PA; both sites were selected and will receive \$259,618 and \$227,476, respectively. With funding, these sites will implement projects based on the Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) model of FEP response, a collaborative, recovery-based approach that has been successfully employed in Australia, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and Canada.

In a press release, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald said that these awards are an acknowledgement of the “robust behavioral health system of care already in place in Allegheny County, and we thank [the funders] for giving us the opportunity to expand the specialty populations that system serves.”