

Report on Research Meeting with Department of Health - Manatee County

Background

Our research team met with Anastasia Peele, Amara Bailey, and Hannah Sanborn from the local Manatee County chapter of the Florida Department of Health (DOH). The DOH is a state agency with local chapters that collaborate. They utilize an integrated healthcare system approach and are guided by their ICARE (Innovation, Collaboration, Accountability, Responsiveness & Excellence) values. The DOH does not run programs themselves, rather their role is to connect people with the proper resources they may need.

Amara Bailey - CORE (Coordinated Opioid Recovery) Coordinator, DOH liaison for the Behavioral Health CHIP (Community Health Improvement Plan) Subcommittee for the Manatee Healthcare Alliance

Anastasia Peele - Health Educator Consultant, Minority Health Liaison for the DOH, Previous DOH liaison for the Behavioral Health CHIP Subcommittee (2020-2023).

Hannah Sanborn - Health Educator Consultant for the DOH

Behavioral Health CHIP Subcommittee

The Behavioral Health CHIP Subcommittee's goal is to improve behavioral health outcomes in Manatee County. Each 3-year CHIP cycle changes to reflect the evolving priorities of the subcommittees and broader community. This is similar to how STREAM's action cycle changes yearly based on current needs and focus areas.

Mental Health Funding

The DOH representatives unanimously agreed there is insufficient funding allocated for mental healthcare, both in Florida and in Manatee County. Since joining the DOH, Anastasia only remembers one grant that was dedicated specifically to mental health. Comparatively, many more resources are being directed toward opioid overdose reduction initiatives and substance use disorder awareness campaigns.

Mental Illness Prevalence

While final updated prevalence numbers were not yet available for Manatee County, we were pointed to the [Flhealthcharts.gov](https://flhealthcharts.gov) resource which provides access to explore county health data and ask questions. Though they declined to speculate on which groups may be most at risk, Amara did say those without access to help are most vulnerable regardless of age. For example, elders can be at heightened risk due to isolation, while children face barriers to directly accessing resources or articulating problems. Available data shows the suicide rate is highest among 25-34 year olds, followed by those 75 and over. Additionally,

65-74-year-olds in Manatee are hospitalized for mental health reasons at a higher rate than the state average.

Achieving CHIP Smart Objectives

The Behavioral Health CHIP Subcommittee set smart goals in 2020 to complete by December of 2023. We asked how successful they were in meeting the following goals specifically.

Reducing unintentional injury deaths per 100,000:

Baseline: 66.3, November 2020

Target: 43.2 by December 2023

Reducing suicide rate per 100,000: unintentional injury deaths per 100,000

Baseline: 15.9, November 2020

Target: 12.8 by December 2023

Reducing drug overdose deaths per 100,000

Baseline: 32, November 2020

Target: 20.7 by December 2023

Anastasia reported that the Behavioral Health CHIP Subcommittee was not successful at all in achieving their 2020-2023 Smart Objectives. Every subcommittee outside of a breastfeeding initiative actually saw undesirable increases in the statistics related to their focuses. Anastasia shared her perspective that the goals initially selected may have simply been too ambitious or lofty. While the subcommittees had big aspirations, they did not necessarily have the level of influence or power required to directly drive population-level change. Amara added that progress becomes very difficult if policymakers and legislators are not also prioritizing mental health.

[Click here to access the 2021-2023 Community Health Improvement Plan](#)

Shift in CHIP Focus

The CHIP cycles bring new areas of focus each round based on the changing needs and priorities of the community. For the current 2024-2026 cycle, priority areas include opioid overdose reduction, substance abuse disorder awareness, and destigmatization of mental illness. A new piloted treatment approach called the CORE (Coordinated Opioid Recovery) Network is being tested, which requires therapy participation alongside the full-scale response to drug addiction.

[Click here to access the 2021-2023 Community Health Assessment](#)

[Click here to access the 2024-2026 Community Health Assessment](#)

Mental Health Crisis in Manatee

It was agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic brought mental health struggles to the forefront of public consciousness. While the DOH focuses broadly on "mental well-being," stigma surrounding mental illness persists. Both nationwide and locally in Manatee County, there is a mental health crisis occurring. Hannah highlighted that youth mental health concerns in particular are being constantly brought up by their partners, underscoring it is a highly prevalent issue warranting attention.

Mental Healthcare Costs

The representatives shared that if providers do not accept Medicare, costs increase dramatically for patients. Therapy sessions can range anywhere from \$100-350 per session based on provider acceptance of insurance types. Patients typically need multiple sessions a month, sometimes multiple sessions weekly. While partners may have more detailed cost data, data use agreements determine what they are able to share.

Mental Health Professional Shortage

Manatee County has been designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as both a Primary Care and Mental Health Professional Shortage Area. This designation indicates there is an inadequate number of healthcare providers relative to the population size and amount of need. For example, there are not enough beds available locally for adult psychiatric care, though Centerstone recently increased its capacity.

Increasing Access to Care

They were unaware of any coordinated efforts underway to address the shortage of mental health professionals in Manatee County. Centerstone leads much of the local mental healthcare and is independently working to increase access, but no larger-scale initiatives exist to their knowledge and Anastasia stated that any increase is certainly not keeping up with the need.

Seriously Mentally Ill Criteria

When asked about definitions and criteria for adults categorized as Seriously Mentally Ill and children designated as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed, the two designations mentioned in the Community Health Assessment, the representatives were unsure but said they would gather more information to share with our team. I will send out a further update on this as soon as I have more information.

Youth Mental Health Efforts

Initially, youth mental health was not an area of focus for the local DOH. However, after discussions highlighted it as a growing issue, the Youth Development Subcommittee was formed. This subcommittee now aims to expand knowledge and training around the

Teen/Youth Mental Health First Aid Program. They also survey children using the Florida Youth Survey to gather youth perspectives.

Self-Harm and Prolonged Sadness Data

Despite 2020 survey data indicating high rates of self-harm (1 in 10 students) and prolonged sadness (over 1 in 4 students) among Manatee County youth aged 11-17, the DOH representatives were unaware of specific actions taken to address these concerns. Anastasia stated that there is a consensus that not enough is being done in general. However, they did share that North River Prevention Partners is now piloting a program offering free therapy and support for local youth and families. The pandemic made it difficult to access students directly through schools to provide such programming. Anastasia stated that since she has started with the DOH she does not recall ANYTHING ever being doing to address suicide and unintentional injury rates in Manatee County, though they are both higher than the state average.