
Press Release

Mental Health Emergency Center Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 10, 2020

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New Mental Health Emergency Center Planned for Milwaukee County Residents

*Milwaukee County and Four Local Health Systems Enter Negotiations to
Develop Joint Venture*

MILWAUKEE - Today Milwaukee County, represented by the Mental Health Board and the [Behavioral Health Division](#), along with the four Milwaukee Health Systems – [Advocate Aurora Health](#), [Ascension Wisconsin](#), [Children’s Wisconsin](#) and [Froedtert Health](#) – have entered into a Letter of Intent to develop a joint venture (JV) mental health emergency center. This new emergency center is the next major milestone in their shared efforts toward redesigning the county-wide mental health delivery system. Final agreements are slated for approvals in February 2021. Community engagement, detailed design and construction of the new center are expected to begin in early 2021 with the goal of being operational by the spring of 2022.

“We’re no longer looking at only public or only private solutions to help those suffering from mental illness,” said David Crowley, Milwaukee County Executive. “The beauty of this new center is that it’s creating a first-of-its kind partnership between BHD and our community health systems that offers an overarching continuum of care. On their worst possible day, those in need can come to the mental health emergency center to get help in a humane way. It will be a community place of healing where residents will get the care and love that they deserve.”

The new mental health emergency center is coming to fruition after years of assessment of community needs, research of national models, and input from consumers and clinical providers. It will provide assessment, stabilization, emergency treatment and effective connections for follow up and ongoing inpatient, residential, community-based outpatient and peer support services to children and adults experiencing a mental health crisis. Additionally, it will serve as a training center for psychiatric medical residents and offer other professional education and peer support services.



While the model of care is currently under development, it will be based on BHD’s nationally recognized Psychiatric Crisis Service (PCS), which functions as a mental health emergency department at the regional medical center in Wauwatosa.

“For nearly a decade, BHD has been transforming to become a best practice model of care, in partnership with advocates and consumers, health systems, community health centers, and other community-based organizations,” said Michael Lappen, Behavioral Health Division Administrator. “This new center will be an integral component of an improved crisis delivery system, intended to serve all patients regardless of the severity of their illness or ability to pay. The emergency center will be part of the continuum of new and planned crisis services including expanded mobile, residential, peer support and outpatient services.”

The mental health emergency center will be developed and operated as a joint venture, with Milwaukee County bearing responsibility for 50 percent of the construction, start-up and operating costs and the health systems funding the other 50 percent; each contributing an equal portion. Construction and other startup costs are anticipated to be \$12 million. The health systems and Mental Health Board are hoping to attract philanthropic support from other providers, foundations and individuals committed to community health improvement. Additionally, the JV partners are working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to ensure appropriate licensure and explore reimbursement sources available under Medicaid funding mechanisms. The center will provide services to all Milwaukee County residents, regardless of ability to pay, and may have the capacity to support surrounding counties in the future.

Advocate Aurora Health (AAH) has agreed to serve as the manager of the mental health emergency center and will be responsible for the employment of the physicians and staff, as well as the day-to-day operations on behalf of the JV. As the largest provider of behavioral and mental health services in the State of Wisconsin, AAH will bring significant clinical and patient service expertise to the delivery of care.

“Milwaukee’s health systems are committed to improving the availability, accessibility and acceptability of mental health services in our community. Our collective Community Health Needs Assessment emphasized the importance of expanding behavioral health access, especially for those experiencing a mental health crisis,” said Carrie Killoran, president of the Greater Milwaukee patient service area for Advocate Aurora Health and chairperson of the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership. “The new mental health emergency center will provide patient-centered, and recovery-oriented care for Milwaukee area residents. And, we strongly believe that this innovative model, in collaboration with law enforcement, the courts, and patients themselves, will not only ensure timely treatment, but will have a meaningful impact on reducing stigma and decriminalizing mental illness.”

“Unacceptable health disparities in our city and state, including the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on our Black and Hispanic neighbors, continue to put stress on kids and families. Even before the pandemic increased the level of trauma, rate of mental health illness and substance abuse, there was not enough access to mental health services. This new mental health center will provide community-based emergency care 24/7 and will connect patients — including children and adolescents — to much needed clinical and social supports. It is one of many steps we must do to improve the mental health of our children, co-workers, loved ones and friends,” said Peggy Troy, president and CEO of Children’s Wisconsin.

The proposed location for the mental health emergency center is on the near north side of Milwaukee, on property presently owned by Milwaukee County. Currently, 93 percent of patient visits to the Psychiatric Crisis Services Center (PCS) at the Behavioral Health Division’s Mental Health Complex originate from the City of Milwaukee, and more than 70 percent of the patients served by PCS live in close proximity to the proposed



location; making it more convenient and accessible for the majority of users. The location is served by public transportation and is adjacent to the freeway, ensuring ready access for those in need of care, as well as for county-wide law-enforcement personnel assisting with crisis response. Once open, the center will serve as an “anchor institution” in the surrounding neighborhood providing economic benefit and employing approximately 70 full-time equivalent staff. During construction, dozens of jobs through local construction firms [CG Schmidt](#) and minority-owned [JCP Construction](#) will also be created. Throughout the design phase of the mental health emergency center, community input will be invited to assure the center will be an ongoing source of safety, security and vitality for the neighborhood.

The Milwaukee County BHD hospital, including the PCS emergency department, will remain open until the new mental health emergency center is operational. For more information and to stay up to date, please visit county.milwaukee.gov/EN/DHHS/BHD.

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