



## First Connection Work Group Meeting Notes

June 18, 2024

8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Paso del Norte Health Foundation

221 N. Kansas, 19<sup>th</sup> Floor

El Paso, Texas 79901

Meeting Room C

### Attendees:

Sharon Butterworth  
Dr. Sandra Calderon  
Mariana Cardenas  
Luis Cenicerros  
Valeria Contreras  
David Cotchery  
Sandra Day  
Daniely Gutierrez  
Josue Lachica  
Dr. Sarah Martin  
Enrique Mata  
Claudia Munoz  
Celeste Nevarez  
Mida Ponce  
Julie Priego  
Wes Temple  
Renee Zapien

### Representing:

Paso del Norte Center at Meadows Institute  
YWCA El Paso del Norte Region  
El Paso Child Guidance Center  
Aliviane Inc.  
Heart Gallery of El Paso  
American GI Forum/National Veterans Outreach  
Paso del Norte Health Foundation  
Region 19 Education Services Center  
Paso del Norte Center at Meadows Institute  
TTUHSC El Paso CPAN/TCHAT – FC Chair  
Paso del Norte Center at Meadows Institute  
Texas Department of Family Protective Services  
Emergence Health Network  
Casa of El Paso  
Aliviane Inc.  
Region 19 Education Services Center  
Heart Gallery of El Paso

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### Welcome and Introductions

Dr Sarah Martin welcomed the group and called for introductions.

### First Connection through community settings

Enrique Mata provided an overview of the discussions during past meetings and recognized the group overarching goal “to make the first connection with mental health support a positive one.” He shared the Meadow’s Institute website where [Collaborative Care Model tools](#) can be found including research briefs on the models effectiveness. The open discussion began with the question what can be done to engage provider practices, especially pediatricians to improve coordination of mental health support? The challenge is to

ensure that when a referral for mental health services is needed, no person should have to wait for a first connection that provides, at a minimum, an assessment and plan of care with support options should therapeutic care take more time to coordinate. Highlights of the discussion included:

- Texas Tech Child Psychiatry has presented numerous Grand rounds on pediatric and peri-pan related topics. The primary audience has been physician residents.
- Explore engaging with:
  - PHIX
  - PdN Children's Development Center (Help Me Grow)
  - the El Paso Medical Society
  - medical office manager association
  - medical coder association
  - APRN associationto design an annual community provider educational event
- The TTUHSC CPAN/TCHAT Team has done presentations on Project ECHO and measurement-based care.
- The workforce is still a factor with most leaders in this work group voicing openings for professionals. The ideas presented at the last meeting are to keep communication across organizations to help professionals to gain experience as they grow in their careers.
- Collaborative Care model- most practices don't have a staff person who is working on this model. Smaller practices may be more amenable to this model. Focusing efforts to engage coders, office managers or other professional staff may be a way to engage providers.
- One example of a practice effectively utilizing CPAN is the Patels pediatric practice – PdN Center will reach out to talk with them.
- Listing of practices that already have a champion for CPAN or HMG
- Tx MCD agrees to pay for those codes and do private insurances reimburse the same way.

The group also discussed the efforts to improve access to programs such as the Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN) and Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT), and how collaboration is developing with the schools and the nonprofit providers for improved upstream access. Dr. Martin reported that as EPISD joins TCHAT, they will have most districts in their designated service region actively making child health access to telehealth a more seamless option for timely assessment and as needed connection with mental health services. The state is allowing for up to eight sessions. Dr Martin also shared that their Psychiatry residency and fellowship programs continue to grow. They now have four fellows for child psychiatry. The number of slots has doubled and there are now at least five child psychiatrists that have stayed in the region after completing the program. Texas Tech is also working on a pilot project to expand consultation for primary care settings and perinatal women.

### **First Connection through mental health settings**

Ms. Celeste Nevarez shared the progress that has developed with the First Episode Psychosis program. She explained that Emergence Health Network hosts a learning session once per year the most recent was on May 3<sup>rd</sup> titled "Mind Matters: Identifying and Assisting with Psychosis Effectively." She added that they now have staff who have an outreach role to connect with groups in the community so they may learn about the program. Dr. Martin had positive comments on the program's quality and wrap around support to help families gain understanding and connections to support to prevent unnecessary hospitalization. The group

discussed possible ways to address wait time responses when crisis care, or emergency care are involved. The following are highlights from the discussion:

- The wait time for an appointment has been as much as 3 months!
- Ms. Priego recognized the nonprofit organizations that provide peer support or education programs while families are waiting to connect with services (e.g. EP Child Guidance, NAMI support, Aliviane).
- Children younger and younger are being hospitalized. What support can be added to help ensure safety and prevent extreme and traumatic experiences? Can we improve on timely engagement of nontraditional supports?
- For children to have a more accurate and precise assessment, it is vital to have a pediatric medical history. Pediatricians often know vital history for psychiatric assessment, and families may have a much more cooperative attitude with pediatrician support.
- What can be done to improve parental capacity to assist their children?
- What about urgent care centers? How can we improve the capacity of urgent care to coordinate with pediatricians and mental health services.
- Day programs can contribute quite a bit to successful treatment plans (e.g. IOP, PHP). EHN has a day program, but it is only for adolescents at this time.
- There are still families that have a strong fear of connection with the mental health system
- Can we explore TEA policy on liability that may be a barrier for timely care referral within the schools? For example, how can parents be informed in a positive and reassuring way with follow up for a positive first connection with pediatricians or mental health system without fear of retaliation?
- TCHAT is a great resource but can only be accessed through the trained school lead. The state consortium is moving to an official policy that schools have to be the connection.
- The good news is that in almost 90% of referred cases, after 5 sessions with TCHAT, there has been no need for after care.
- TCHAT is also improving capacity to serve by moving to up to 8 sessions per child, some universities are going to be able to transfer children to a more specialized care (for those who need it). If there is a waiting list that is more than 1 month away, other sites that are not as busy may take on the client. All El Paso districts are activating a process to connect with TCHAT except Ysleta. Schools must be trained for referral process. Schools usually have a referral lead (e.g. counselor).
- Parents are not always receptive. Referral for the follow up sessions is parent through the school lead. There is a concern about parental worries with any negative consequences.
- Ms. Nevarez commented that first episode psychosis is becoming available for individuals between the ages of 13-30 years of age. Full services are available through the program.
- The day program model with EHN is the least restrictive and prevents disconnection from the family support system. Note there are months with higher-than-normal youth referrals for mental health support. For example, April is a high anxiety month mostly due to state testing.

#### **Other Business:**

The group had a follow up discussion on the recently released book called “The Anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness.” At a previous meeting Ms. Butterworth shared the following podcast link that summarizes the book: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-anxious-generation-with-jonathan-haidt/id1561689671?i=1000650449476> . Mr. Mata shared that in recent

weeks articles and news updates came out citing improved behavior and grades for kids in schools where cell phones were set aside as students enter the schools. For example, a June 2024 USA Today article "[States and School Districts Weigh in on Cell Phones](#)", and a [Good Morning America release](#) show the changes being explored in other communities. The group discussed the idea of taking mobile phones from youth during the school day. Several voiced concerns with such actions explaining that the negative responses for youth and adults to be limited in their access to technology are likely to be much more traumatic than any positive benefits. It was suggested that continuing to identify educational programs on the safe use of technology including cyber applications would be a much better investment.

Ms. Valeria Contreras shared information on the open call for proposals under the Heart Galleries of Texas Phase II Grants. She explained that the grant opportunity targets organizations who connect with foster care youth. The organization does not need to be a current child placing agency. She provided a flyer with links to the [Phase II Heart Gallery Funding Application](#) page. Applications will be accepted from June 15th through July 15th. The Heart Galleries of Texas Project, in partnership with the Moritz Center for Societal Impact at the University of Texas Austin and the Texas Center for Child and Family Studies, is seeking applications to establish or sustain post-adoption and post-permanency supports throughout Texas. This grant opportunity aims to strengthen heart gallery programs and support children and families post-adoption and post-permanency, addressing needs such as mental health services, educational support, therapeutic interventions, respite care, family counseling, and more. For questions or further assistance, contact Valeria Contreras at Heart Gallery of El Paso [valeria@heartgalleryofelpaso.org](mailto:valeria@heartgalleryofelpaso.org) or Erin Argue at [eargue@tacfs.org](mailto:eargue@tacfs.org).

During the discussion, Ms. Claudia Munoz also shared that more foster parents are needed to support children currently in the system. This group could also strategize on ways to address a default response to hospitalize a foster child when they begin to act out. One suggestion was to have foster parents take a Mental Health First Aid class. It was also reinforced that improving support networks is a much-needed intervention. Informal peer support is important to have readily available.

### **Next Steps:**

The PdN Center will engage with select partners to explore the following items and report back at the next meeting:

- Listing of pediatric or other practices that already have an active connection to CPAN or HMG
- Are there any good Samaritan protections for school staff or volunteers who refer youth for mental health support? What is TEA's current position on this topic?
- Are the reimbursements for Collaborative Care Model practices covered not only with Texas Medicaid, but also with private insurance payors.
- Explore engaging with organizations to design an annual community provider educational event including: PHIX, TTUHSC CPAN/TCHAT, PdN Children's Development Center (Help Me Grow), the El Paso Medical Society, medical office manager association, medical coder association, APRN association

### **Next Meeting:**

**The group will be targeted to meet on August 20<sup>th</sup> at Paso del Norte Health Foundation, Meeting Room C from 8:30 – 10:00 am.** Room availability will need to be confirmed. A meeting notice will be sent to the FLC members.

## Work Group Participant Contact List:

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