



Annual Update to the Allegan County Commission

July 9, 2020

Our Mission

Strengthening our community by improving and advocating for the lives of individuals and families.

Our Vision

Building a community which provides integrated behavioral health care effectively, efficiently, and sustainably for all who require it.

Our Core Values

Integrity, Honor, Equality, Innovation, Teamwork, Cultural Competency.

Thank you, Commissioners and Administrator Sorro, for the opportunity to present this annual update from Allegan County Community Mental Health. Ordinarily I would have relished the opportunity to share a clever PowerPoint presentation with you, but the times call for a more standard written report that can be more easily delivered at a distance.

I'd like to share with you several updates and developments related to our work, and close by inviting you to find a way to celebrate with us in this very special – though unusual – year.

COVID-19

As we are all too painfully aware, the onset of the COVID-19 crisis has thrown a giant curve ball at every kind of business and enterprise in the county, and CMH is no exception. Ever since the initiation of Governor Whitmer's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order on 3/24/2020, we have been working to figure out a new way to continue our work with the people we serve.

- We went from being an office-based crew to a largely off-site crew.
- We secured additional technology (phones and computers) and adopted virtual meeting platforms for our meetings and secure versions for our client contacts.
- We supported our staff by offering "Administrative Leave" time for those unable to do their work and have seen that time diminish a lot over the six or seven payroll periods that have transpired since March.
- We provided each staff with a daily email update on agency activities to keep everyone in the loop. As of 6/30/2020, we're up to edition #68 – having throttled back to 2x/week now.
- We consult regularly and in an ongoing manner with many different partners:
 - Locally with the Allegan County Health Department
 - Regionally with the Lakeshore Regional Entity
 - Statewide with the MI Dept of Health and Human Services
- We participated faithfully in the coordinating activities of the Emergency Operations Center.
- We have enjoyed the continued support of our board – which, thanks to your recent actions – have filled all twelve seats with outstanding community representatives, including three of your Commissioners – Chairperson Jim Storey, Mark DeYoung, Gale Dugan – all of whom have been excellent in their service.

Based on a survey conducted in May, the experience of our clients to all the telehealth offerings has been mixed. Some find it convenient and a practical help to their transportation challenges. Some miss the in-person interaction, and/or have technology problems or limitations that makes it impractical. I suspect we will work to maintain it where it works and is preferred and revert to in-person services as soon as our plan permits for those who do not prefer that mode of delivery.

We cannot predict the path or timeline of the crisis but are doing our part to keep it as short as possible by keeping everyone as safe as possible.

NEW BUILDING

We are in the lengthy process of purchasing and eventually refurbishing the former Shopko store on Jenner Drive across from Ascension Allegan Hospital. We have already gone many rounds with our USDA mortgage application to conform it to their fluctuating documentation requirements. We think we are close to the end of their process and will be able to proceed to construction and build-out phases after that.

All architectural and financial feasibility work for the building is complete, as it had to be submitted with the USDA application. The building will house all our current operations and allow for near-term expansion to include integrated physical and behavioral healthcare as well as increased capacity for the treatment of substance use disorders. We have a dire need to offer an in-county option for people with opioid and methamphetamine dependence.

If all goes well, and we secure the USDA's commitment by September, we could be on track to move the entire CMH operation into the Shopko location sometime in late 2021. I'm grateful to Rob Sarro and his team for their support in planning. We anticipate continuing our partnership through the county for a number of services in the new location.

FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Mental health is such an important community concern, touching on every aspect of life for most of our community members. Mental Health America reports that nationally between 2012 and 2017,

- youth major depression increased from 8.66% to 13.01%
- only 28.2% of these youth received consistent care
- adult serious suicidal ideation increased from 3.77% to 4.19%
- more individuals have private health insurance but 8.1% did not have mental health coverage (up from 4.6% in 2012)

People are concerned for themselves and for their family members and neighbors. One way the community can help is by responding to a special one-time campaign for financial support. The proceeds of that campaign will give county residents and business leaders a tangible way to support the community by making it possible for Allegan County CMH to locate our services in a highly visible, strategic and accessible location for years to come.

MODERNIZING OUR IDENTITY

The past couple of years have been spent evaluating the strategic needs of the organization and our mission/vision/values have been revised (see page 1, left column). What started as an effort to bring citizens home from institutional care and integrate them into community life in the 1970's has shifted. We continue to work to help everyone who struggles with chronic mental illness or developmental/intellectual disabilities achieve a full and rich life in their community.

However, we do so much more to intervene in mental health crises as they happen, we serve in support of courts and the jail as they deal with individuals with mental illness, we facilitate access to addiction treatment and offer recovery supports, we address childhood trauma and behavioral difficulties that emerge in childhood and we support healthy living and positive development for youth. ACCMHS is the homelessness go-to agency for Allegan County.

In the next several months, we will consider options for rebranding/renaming the agency. "Community Mental Health" services are our roots, but this name can stand in the way of how the public understands our services. We look to increase accurate interaction with an agency with strong skills in behavioral health that is dynamically engaged with the larger health care system, and which offers many other resources to support success and well-being.

STRATEGIC DISCUSSION

On August 11, our board and key partners (architect, branding consultant, fund developer) will come together for a work session to consider how we can bring all of these elements together – building, branding, & bucks – amid the COVID-19 crisis. Our cause is noble, and our work is challenging, and what it means to this community is what drives our daily efforts.

FIFTY YEARS

I know, we don't look a day over 35. But CMH was born on July 1, 1970! I spent a lot of time all through 2019 digging through archives of board minutes and agency archives and old newspaper articles about everything that happened in those 50 years. There is so much to remember and appreciate. Unfortunately, COVID-19 sunk our plans for a collective event – but someday, when this is all done, we will do just that. We will remember our past together and with humility commit ourselves to a future of great service to the people of Allegan County.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Sincerely,

Mark A. Witte, MSW, LMSW
Executive Director
7/1/2020