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Transforming How New Hampshire Responds to the Opioid Crisis

Every day, we hear tragic stories about the opioid crisis in New Hampshire. The impact on our State is especially stark, as our neighborhoods and towns are being devastated by the spread of heroin, fentanyl and other opioids.

Approximately one in five people covered by the New Hampshire Medicaid Program lives with a diagnosed mental health condition or substance use disorder. As the State's Medicaid program, we cannot ignore the role behavioral health and substance use play in the overall health of the clients we serve. That is why we are working with healthcare and social service providers throughout New Hampshire to transform how health care is delivered to ensure that our families, friends and neighbors get the care they need to lead healthy lives.

How are we doing this? We're developing an entirely new way to provide care that will better meet the physical, behavioral, and social support needs of those suffering with mental illness or substance use disorders.

First, approximately 350 organizations in New Hampshire are formally working together to coordinate our efforts to care for those served by the Medicaid program. We believe this new provider network will help us identify and treat mental health, substance use, physical health, and social service needs early on. This coordinated approach will cut down on hospital admissions and visits to the hospital emergency rooms and lead to a healthier population.

Second, because the best way to meet local needs is with local solutions, seven regional networks are each carrying out projects specifically tailored to the needs of their communities. These include expanding intensive substance use disorder treatment programs, integrating treatment for co-occurring disorders, and enhancing care coordination.

Third, organizations across New Hampshire are training their staff, hiring new staff, and using new technologies to carry out these new programs. They are hiring mental health counselors, substance use counselors, community health workers, nurses, and more.

These efforts toward transformation are possible due to the State's partnership with seven Integrated Delivery Networks (IDNs) throughout New Hampshire. We're doing this under the Medicaid "Delivery System Reform Incentive Program" or "DSRIP." DSRIP is a federally funded program that aims to transform how we meet the physical and behavioral health needs of our residents.

This is an important opportunity for caring for people on Medicaid. The IDNs are hiring more providers to meet their region's needs for mental health and substance use services. They are working to integrate services for physical health care with services for behavioral health so that their clients and patients will be evaluated and treated for more than just one isolated problem. Finally, they are working to improve coordination and continuity between the services and settings where care is provided, so that the care provided is more effective and comprehensive.

Transforming how healthcare is delivered and how Medicaid services for mental health, physical health, and substance misuse are provided is something we can all get behind. The concepts are sound: better access to high quality health care, better health, and lower costs. We know that combating the opioid crisis will continue to be challenging. With the DSRIP program, we also believe it is within our grasp.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Mission is to join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence.