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Connecticut Providers, Policy Makers, and Parents Issue Recommendations to Decrease Numbers of Youth Visiting Emergency Departments for Behavioral Health Concerns

New Report Includes Strategies to Improve Care and Promote Alternatives to the ED

Farmington, CT – A new report examines the issue of youth who are visiting emergency departments (ED) for behavioral health concerns and offers strategies for Connecticut policy makers, hospitals, mental health agencies, and schools to reduce ED use, improve care within EDs, coordinate and integrate care across systems, and advance appropriate alternatives that address the behavioral health needs of these youth.

“Connecticut has one of the best behavioral health systems for children in the country, and efforts have been made to reduce ED visits among youth with behavioral health conditions, yet we still struggle to address this issue,” said Dr. Jeffrey Vanderploeg, President and CEO of CHDI. “This puts enormous stress on our hospitals even though EDs often are not ideal settings for youth to receive behavioral health assessment or care. I am grateful to the many parents, health and mental health providers, hospitals, and state agency policymakers who helped us better understand this issue and create a set of actionable and promising strategies for Connecticut. I am also encouraged by [new research](#) linking Connecticut’s Mobile Crisis Intervention Services to a 25% reduction in subsequent youth behavioral health ED use. We can improve care for children and families by building on innovative strategies like this that we know are working.”

The report: [***Emergency Department Use by Connecticut Children with Behavioral Health Conditions: Improving Care and Promoting Alternatives***](#), was prepared by the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) and co-authored by **Beacon Health Options**. CHDI, in partnership with Dr. Michael Hoge at Yale University Department of Psychiatry, conducted individual interviews and convened a workgroup to identify strategies and promising practices for reducing reliance on EDs to address the behavioral health needs of youth. Workgroup participants included family members, representatives of multiple state agencies, hospitals, community behavioral health organizations, schools, and the Connecticut Hospital Association. The work was conducted in collaboration with Beacon Health Options and in consultation with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. The final report includes:

- A review of the literature and national trends
- Data on ED use among youth in Connecticut
- Family and provider experiences
- National and state best practices
- Recommendations and financing strategies to promote alternatives to ED use and improve the quality of ED care

Connecticut has among the nation’s best services and supports for children with behavioral health needs, including: a statewide mobile crisis system, care coordination, evidence-based outpatient and intensive in-home services, specialty autism services, data collection and quality improvement activities, family advocacy, and many other elements. Connecticut ranked 5th in a national ranking of states’ mental health service systems for children, according to a report from [Mental Health America](#). Despite this progress, Connecticut is not immune to a nationwide increase in ED use by children and adolescents who have mental health and substance use problems.

Report recommendations address issues related to improving diversion and timely discharge from EDs, increasing care coordination for families receiving ED services, improving the quality of behavioral health care provided in EDs, and strengthening Connecticut’s system of care to reduce the need for youth to access ED services. The full report includes a more complete description of the findings, recommendations, and proposed next steps.

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