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Human Services' regional human service centers receive four-year national accreditation

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services' eight regional human service centers and four satellite clinics received a four-year national accreditation from the Council on Accreditation (COA) for outpatient behavioral health services that focus on helping people in recovery reach their full potential.

"Accreditation is an exceptional achievement," said Dr. Rosalie Etherington, chief clinical officer for the state's human service clinic system. "This is a testament to the quality behavioral health services we provide to vulnerable North Dakotans and to our team of behavioral health professionals who are committed to making a difference in their lives."

The accreditation process was rigorous and took about 18-months to complete. In addition to the clinic system being evaluated on nearly 500 standards, the process included an in-depth analysis of policies and procedures, along with a review of administration, management and service delivery functions. Virtual and in-person community stakeholder surveys and peer-review site visits were also completed.

"The positive comments and feedback we received from each COA reviewer throughout the accreditation process was very encouraging," said Jeff Stenseth, the department's field services operations officer. "We serve people with very complex needs. This affirmation validates why our behavioral health team members come to work every day ready to help people."

The human service centers and satellite clinics provide crisis behavioral health services on-site, through community outreach and by mobile crisis services. They serve individuals with chronic, serious mental illness and substance use disorders, including pregnant women and others who use intravenous drugs.

Organizations seek accreditation to demonstrate the implementation of best practice standards in the field of human services. During the 2017 legislative session, lawmakers authorized the department to pursue national accreditation for its regional human service centers located in Bismarck, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Minot and Williston and satellite clinics in Grafton, Rolla, Valley City and the Off Main location in Fargo.

Jeremy Smith, the department's accreditation administrator said, "Team members from various areas of the department spent countless hours of hard work on this important project. Achieving accreditation is a huge accomplishment that tells our stakeholders we follow industry best practices that help improve client outcomes."

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During the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, the regional centers and their satellite clinics provided behavioral health services to about 13,793 individuals across the state. Services included almost 7,000 crisis interventions to over 2,100 individuals with significant behavioral health needs. This data reflects a decrease during the initial months of the pandemic in the number of individuals seeking services and served.

According to Etherington, now that the regional human service centers have received national accreditation for their outpatient behavioral health services, team members have started on another COA accreditation process for residential behavioral health services and programs provided by state-operated facilities and contracted providers.

For more information on the regional human service centers and their satellite clinics, including behavioral health walk-in hours at each location, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/regionalhsc/.

Founded in 1977, COA is an independent, not-for-profit accreditor of the full continuum of community-based behavioral health care and social service organizations in the United States and Canada. Over 2,000 organizations have either successfully achieved COA accreditation or are currently engaged in the process.

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