



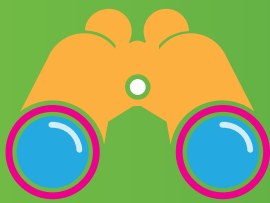
SUPPORT STRENGTHEN SUSTAIN

The Ripple Effect of **COVID-19** on
Mental Health in Tarrant County

In the face of wide-spread trauma, communities can mobilize social support networks and **display ingenuity in adapting to change**. In the wake of this catastrophic pandemic, Tarrant County must be **forward-thinking** in discovering, creating, and implementing transformational strategies to build a unified and **resilient community**.

Mental health challenges must be met with effective and innovative approaches to address the needs left in the wake of this tragic time and to be prepared for the upcoming setbacks.

Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County commissioned this report to:



Review Key Areas of Impact



Compare Pre-pandemic
to Current Trends



Highlight Implications on Tarrant County
Mental Health Delivery System



Create Call to Action

The Ripple Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health



AREAS OF IMPACT

When considering the added influence of long-term economic strain, communities should anticipate a snowball effect of mental health symptoms. In prior epidemics, the number of people whose mental health was impacted far outpaced the number of people who were infected. The end of a viral pandemic is unpredictable, and this uncertainty can result in a chronic sense of fatigue and fear. Lingering trauma symptoms, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and suicidality are expected for years to come. Watchful waiting for the “next event” becomes emotionally exhausting and magnifies vulnerabilities into a continuum of day-to-day life issues and is a major cause of such psychological distress in and of itself.

As the need for mental health support increases, actual service utilization in Tarrant County is declining in some sectors. Typical service delivery methods, such as office visits, are suspended with varying plans to resume. In addition, when services are made available, individuals perception of being safe cannot be assumed.



Collateral Impact From Pandemic: Practices and protocols to deter the spread of the virus creates additional set of stressors that exacerbate day to day stress.

- Recently unemployed or underemployed adults are emotionally impacted by financial insecurity and meeting basic needs for food, payment of past due bills, and maintaining stable housing
- Parents are homeschooling children, while many simultaneously are juggling working from home
- Essential workers, especially healthcare professionals, are overscheduled and overexposed to the trauma responding to COVID-19 infections and deaths. As cases continue to trend upward in Texas, so will the impact on essential workers. Many of these workers are parents of children and/or children of aging parents. The fatigue, stress and physical waning, can impact family support regardless of the best intentions of all members
- The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people of color and other marginalized groups has an exponential impact of grief and loss resulting in long term disparate impact on such communities
- Individuals and family members experiencing increases in conflict, depression, and/or substance misuse may not know how or be at a stage of readiness to access outside assistance

Pre Covid-19

COMPARISON OF PRE PANDEMIC TO CURRENT TRENDS

Times of Covid-19

As recent as 2018, multiple Tarrant County community assessments identified risk indicators in numerous areas of behavioral health

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to the short and long-term mental health of Tarrant County.

Health Care for Staff (Capacity)

Shortage of psychiatrists and other licensed mental health providers has been a critical concern for Tarrant County

Need for increased capacity in behavioral health professionals between 2016 and 2030 was projected at 44%

In current environment, all front-line health care workers are likely to experience traumatic-stress symptoms, exhaustion, and grief leading to less effective staff, or the exodus in the field creating a greater staff shortage instead of staff expansion.

Mental Health Indicators

Mental stress saw upward trends for past 5 years as indicated by suicide rates resident report surveys

1 in 5 people over the age of 65 report experiencing depression, a significant increase since 2010.

For those experiencing mental health stressors, COVID is expected to exacerbate depression, grief, and loss.

For those otherwise "mentally healthy," social isolation, confinement, ongoing stress are all contributors to depression & psychological distress.

Older adults and those experiencing cognitive decline are the most vulnerable for fatalistic results of COVID, with the mental health impact or increasing anxiety, grief & depression.

Domestic Violence & Child Abuse and Neglect

Tarrant County's rate of abuse & neglect was second highest in Texas, exceeding Harris County (Houston); and higher than the state's average.

1 in 3 women affected by intimate partner violence;

Stressors are exacerbated by social isolation and economic strain for families already under chronic stress; and distancing drastically limits the ability of outsiders to initiate referrals for assistance for children

Cook Children's report an increase in the severity of incidents of abuse after shelter-in-place orders.

In May 2020, SafeHaven reported a 33% increase in calls to domestic violence hotline; and, Arlington police reported a 15% increase of domestic violence calls.

Substance Use

In all of Region 3, which includes Dallas and 17 other surrounding counties, Tarrant County represented 60% of those receiving substance use disorder treatment from state funded programs (2015)

Many will turn to alcohol/drugs as a coping response to pandemic stressors. Alcohol purchases increased dramatically in the weeks following social distancing orders in the US

Consequences of substance misuse lead to increases in overall health and mortality risks making this population at high risk for COVID fatalities.

Poverty and Economic Strain

Economic stressors are associated with increases in mental health conditions, depression, substance abuse and suicidality.

For Tarrant County households: there is an upward trend of those living below poverty level; 16% were food insecure; 25% were below basic cost of living;

In Tarrant County, 2020 unemployment rate went from 3.3% in January to 13.4 in April. U.S. unemployment rate is highest since the Great Depression.

Recently unemployed or underemployed adults are emotionally impacted by financial insecurity, meeting basic needs for food, payment of past due bills, and maintaining stable housing.

Health Care Inequity

"Inequities in American health care system have a disproportionate impact on people of color, which contributes to gaps in insurance coverage, uneven access to services, poorer health outcomes, especially African Americans."

The high mortality rate among African Americans and added stressors of higher risk of infection, and the greater impact of grief and loss will have long term disparate impact on such communities

IMPLICATIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Implications for Texas

In April 2020, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) issued the report, "Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Impacts of a COVID-19 Economic Recession." The report revealed the findings of its calculated statistical models and the mental health implications.

APRIL 2020 MMHPI REPORT 'Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Impacts of a COVID-19 Economic Recession.'

1
The public health crisis:
COVID 19 infection, death
and shelter-in-place orders

2
**Mental health despair
and trauma manifestation:**
Increased substance misuse, domestic
violence, social isolation, depression, trauma

3
Economic Recession:
Immediate downturn of economic activity of
25% followed by sustained impacts: job loss,
industry weakening, collapse of oil prices

4
Increase in deaths
due to suicide, overdose
and violence

"...for every five-percentage
point increase in unemployment in Texas
during the COVID recession across a year, an
additional 725 Texans could die each year from
suicide and drug overdose." (MMHPI, 2020, p. 3)

Implications for Tarrant County The Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County sent a rapid assessment survey in May 2020 to 28 organizational leaders in order to "test the temperature" of leadership regarding the challenges presented with COVID-19. Findings are summarized below:

89%

expect mental health
service needs to
increase as a result of
COVID 19

84%

will need resources
to support the
self-care &
resilience of the
mental health
workforce

63%

are significantly
concerned with
filling revenue gaps
resulting from
changes to contracts,
billing, &
decreased donations

53%

indicated their
organization
lacked the
resources &
expertise needed
to respond
effectively to the
changing mental
health needs of the
community

53%

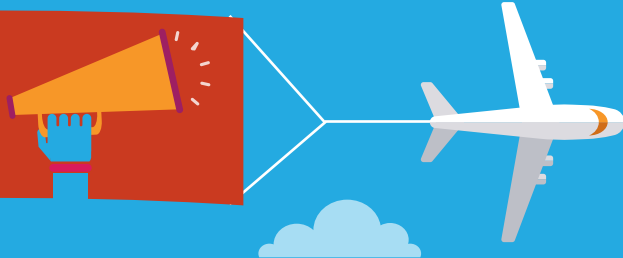
Forecast significant
need to hire
more mental
health staff;

26%

"somewhat"
needed in the
next 18 months

CALL TO ACTION

In the face of wide spread trauma, communities can mobilize social support networks and display ingenuity in adapting to change. There is evidence to consider that “post traumatic growth” can be a bequest as we move from calamity to a new reality.



Planning:

There is a need to plan for and use new resources to strategically build an infrastructure that has the capacity to respond effectively to future wide-spread crises. Unprecedented change calls for a pivot to restructure the delivery of health and mental health services.

“Moving Forward Together: A Call to Action for Tarrant County to Meet the Behavioral Health Challenges for the Future” provides a useful framework for Tarrant County to assess the impact of new approaches to achieving an integrated continuum for community behavioral health and wellbeing. Health behaviors and the social and physical environment in which individuals live, work and learn have a stronger influence on well-being than clinical services alone.

Moving Forward Together includes:

1) Making behavioral health a shared value;

2) Fostering cross-sector collaboration to improve population well-being;

3) Creating healthier, more equitable communities;

4) Strengthening integration of behavioral health services and systems county-wide.

Whole Society Approach:

Global pandemic experts recommend a coordinated set of actions that promote resilience and offer mental health supports in all sectors (education, faith, health, mental health, business, non-profit, governmental, etc.) The mental health and emergency management communities should work together to identify, develop, and disseminate evidence-based resources related to disaster mental health, mental health triage and referral, needs of special populations, and death notification and bereavement care.

Tarrant County should seek ways of maintaining and further developing the current formalized community partnership approach for behavioral healthcare delivery system with the goal of becoming increasingly holistic, collaborative, and dynamic in utilizing alliances. This will aid in engaging countywide planning and implementation for coordination of all healthcare providers to help minimize exacerbation of behavioral health conditions. Coordinated approaches help prevent, or lower mental health acuity, and creates a more effective and efficient system.



Data Access & Documentation:

As part of an overall strategic planning process, data-driven decision-making will be crucial to an effective community response. Indicators of community mental health and resilience are needed to establish priorities and monitor progress to help guide an effective community response.

Current local data will be needed to access additional sources of funding and tangible supports for organizations. It will be important to develop strategies to rapidly identify changing needs and communication to possible funding sources. Integrating mental health assessment with COVID-19 testing and screening is an important area for further consideration.

New Normal:

In the face of wide spread trauma, communities can mobilize social support networks and display ingenuity in adapting to change. From the ashes, there is the likelihood of a more compassionate, resilient, and thriving community for all who live here.

SUPPORT STRENGTHEN SUSTAIN

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Our Mission is to “revolutionize Tarrant County mental health services by developing long-term changes in the system while addressing emerging needs.”

Mental Health Connection (MHC) of Tarrant County is non-profit collaboration that began in 2002 and is composed of a diverse group of dues paying members that include:

- Non-profit & for-profit mental health and substance use providers
- Hospitals
- Independent school districts and universities
- Child welfare and foster care organizations
- Juvenile and criminal justice systems
- County mental health authority
- Individual practitioners
- Community members who have been impacted by mental health and substance use challenges

www.mentalhealthconnection.org



An Initiative of
Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County

Recognize & Rise is a community awareness campaign designed to support those who have experienced the impact of trauma, toxic stress and adversity. As a community, we can learn to better understand those struggles, and create a culture of compassion and understanding. We can provide the support and resources needed to heal.

www.recognizeandrise.org



NOTE: You can download complete report “Support, Strengthen, Sustain; Ripple Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health In Tarrant County,” by Emily Spence, Ph.D and report source citings from the MHC website at www.mentalhealthconnection.org