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CHIP Title: Providing Mental Health Services to High School Students in a Mental Health Dessert

Project Description:

Mental health needs in our communities are soaring, especially in our high school students. Adolescence is a time when young people are struggling to fit in, socially and emotionally. They are especially vulnerable to bullying, family dysfunction, problems in school, and trauma. Any of these situations may trigger a mental health issue. Mental health problems can affect a student's energy level, concentration, dependability, mental ability, and optimism. Research suggests that depression is associated with lower grade point averages, and that co-occurring depression and anxiety can increase this association.

Families served by White Memorial Community Health Center, a FQHC Look-Alike in Boyle Heights, have communicated the need for culturally and linguistically sensitive, in-person mental health services for their children. Adolescent patients at our clinic have shared their concerns related to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, trauma, and suicidal ideation.

According to June 2022 data collected by LAUSD Student Health and Human Services, "Despite efforts to enhance linkages and referrals to agencies and community-based organizations, placing mental health services on school campuses has been one of the most successful strategies for moving from referral to service delivery and overcoming the stigma associated with mental illness."

Over 100 of our patients at WMCHC attend Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School, a LAUSD community school of under 1,000 students in Boyle Heights. During the pandemic, the only local DMH clinic providing mental health services to this high school, stopped taking referrals for mental health services and never returned. This high school was left with no community support to offer their students mental health services.

The Behavioral Health Department at White Memorial Community Health Center have bicultural and bilingual Associate Clinical Social Workers and Licensed Clinical Social Workers who are trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Focused approaches, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy approaches. However, there was no collaboration between WMCHC and LAUSD to ameliorate the need for increased access to mental health services for high school students in our community.

This CHIP project aims to develop and coordinate a partnership to provide in-person mental health services to students at an underserved high school in Boyle Heights.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned:

- I began this project on May 2022 and we are in the implementation stage.
- Initial contact with LAUSD Organization Facilitator, Wellness Programs Region East Boyle Heights Community of Schools – May 2022
- Began process of completing MOU and SDA with LAUSD – September 2022

- LAUSD Local District Superintendent approved and signed MOU - December 2022
- MOU Forwarded to LAUSD Central Office for Approval – December 2022
- MOU and SDA final approval by LAUSD and WMCHC. March 2023
- Applied to Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) approval to open a satellite office at Mendez High School – March 2023
- Approval of additional site by HRSA – May 2023
- Finalized workflow for student registration at WMCHC to begin mental health services at Mendez High School
- Met with Mendez High School Personnel to finalize referral process and on-campus therapy office space for ACSW providing mental health services to students.
- Patients have been scheduled to begin receiving in person mental health services at Mendez High school on Thursday, September 7, 2023.

Next Steps:

- Increase mental health services from two days per week to five days per week.
- Use pre and post PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores to measure a decrease in symptoms.
- Offer group therapy sessions focusing on trauma, depression, and anxiety for students during school hours.
- Expand in-person mental health services to other LAUSD schools in Boyle Heights