



MEMORANDUM

September 21, 2021

TO: Board of Commissioners

FROM: Robert J. Sarro, County Administrator

RE: **Mental Health Assistance for COVID-19**

In the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic, schools have confronted significant challenges as students and their families have quickly shifted from in-school classes to an online format, then back to an in-school format with mitigation strategies (including masks, spacing, cleaning, etc.) while trying to make plans amidst great uncertainty. The pandemic itself has caused much worry, stress, and grief. These stressors can cause mental health challenges for anyone and can cause acute symptoms to appear for people who may experience mental health challenges.

During the September 9th Allegan County Board of Commissioners' Meeting, Administration was asked to research mental health support options for Allegan County students/families relative to COVID-19. In identifying options, the concept of a Student Assistance Program (SAP) surfaced as a possibility. A SAP is defined as a systematic team process used to mobilize resources to remove barriers to learning. SAPs are designed to assist in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues which pose a barrier to a student's success. The primary goal of a SAP is to help students overcome these barriers so that they may achieve, advance, and remain in school.

Family members of students can also access these services. Whether we specifically refer to a program as a SAP or Community Assistance Program (CAP), when getting quotes for these services, vendors confirmed that we could confine services to strictly COVID-19 related issues that are not pre-existing (prior to the pandemic). Please be advised that while some options could include the ability for existing providers to be included in the support network, it is not recommended, nor proposed, that Allegan County provide any direct reimbursements to families or providers but rather access to service. **Based on the information below, it is recommended both administratively and legally that services be offered in a broad sense of COVID-19 Mental Health Support. As such, Administration recommends utilizing the CCBHC program through CMH. Since CMH services may need start-up time, it is recommended that the Charles Nechtum program be utilized initially to help assess the demand for service and provide immediate assistance. Service needs can be re-evaluated in 90 days.**

1. **Mark A. Witte, MSW, LMSW**, Executive Director, Allegan County CMH Services

Allegan CMH was awarded a SAMHSA grant that started August 23, 2021, for Certified Community Behavioral Healthcare Clinic (CCBHC) Services. CMH is in the early phases of operationalizing that service which must be stood up within four (4) months of award (which for us will be December for everything required). Counseling services are a

required element, as are crisis response services. CMH is aware that many individuals have insurance resources that could address these needs as well. CMH will be working toward becoming paneled to provide these services with as many insurance companies as are necessary to meet the needs of our community to have a local provider. The grant provides \$2,000,000 per year for two (2) years which allows CMH to hire the staff needed to provide all of the additional services required by the grant.

Considering the information above, CMH declined the invitation to submit a proposal for county funds to meet the need (whatever it ends up being), but rather substitute a proposal with an offer to use their new grant to cover whatever cost might happen. CMH can offer the service from 8 am to 12 midnight, 7 days a week. This would include unlimited telephonic counseling available by CMH staff as well as referrals to face to face providers when necessary. It is expected that 90% of the issues can be handled by our phone therapists.

2. Mr. Charles Nechtem, Charles Nechtem Associates, Inc.

Costs for services would be \$.34 per student/per month for the 17,948 (\$73,228 per year), eligible students including family members.

A program for the entire county, 118,081 people, would be \$.096 per member/per month (\$136,029 per year).

The program would include unlimited telephonic counseling with the EAP therapists, not face-to-face visits. Face-to-face, when necessary would be covered by insurance or by therapists who charge a sliding scale fee. Most [90%] of the counseling will be done telephonically by our EAP phone therapists. The 10% referred will be substance abuse or chronic issues. If an individual needed to be referred out for face-to-face, only for COVID-19 related issues, their network of providers range from \$75 to \$150 depending on the credentials of the therapist. Charles Nechtem can set this up like the Allegan County EAP. [1-6 sessions] Grief, depression, anxiety, students having to go back to school ...these are the issues they are seeing. The program could be ready by October 1.

3. Mr. Bob VandePol, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services

Currently, there are five (5) schools in the Grand Rapids area that have a Pine Rest SAP (defined above). These clients include a university, high school, elementary school, pre-school, and an entire district.

The service is for three (3) visits and is generally \$9.00 per year, per student per student family (17,948 x \$9 = \$161,532. We assume many families have more than one student in your schools so your costs would be reduced. Five (5) visits could be up to \$18.00, six (6) visits up to \$20.00 (17,948 x \$20 = \$358,960 per year on high end) if for whole community (118,081 x \$20 = \$2,961,620). This would be for the student and family and Faculty and staff, per year. A proposal may be developed further upon Board direction.