



Our community focused on our future

Mental Health Executive Summary

SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence) is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging community members in approaches to improving the quality of life in Sarasota County. Through its annual study of two important community issues and publishing an annual *Community Report Card* our community celebrates its successes and tackles its problems.

Mental Health was one of two topics studied in 2002-2003. The Mental Health Study Group convened in October 2002 and was comprised of any community member who wished to participate. More than seventy individuals were involved throughout the seven months of weekly meetings; a core group of 50 individuals saw this rigorous process through to the end. The study group considered what the community can do to increase access and availability of quality mental health services for all who need them in Sarasota County. The report provides an overview of the range of mental health services and service needs in this community, focusing on major barriers and gaps in care. In a general way, the report considers all levels of need for mental health services—from treatment of people with the most severe and persistent mental illnesses, to mental health promotion for persons at risk of developing mental health problems.

Fifteen meetings were dedicated to hearing presentations from key resource people in our community on various aspects of mental health services. The 29 speakers included administrators representing community organizations that work with people with mental illness, including: the public community mental health center, a private receiving facility, a drop-in center, three organizations that provide vocational services, three housing providers, and a substance abuse agency; clinicians specializing in services to: older adults, children, and multi-cultural clients; scholars from the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute; representatives of the criminal justice system, including the sheriff's department and the public defender's office; a scholar on the topic of prevention of mental illness; and family members and consumers of mental health services. The study group devoted nine additional meetings to reach consensus on their findings, develop conclusions about major problems and commendable efforts in the community, and create recommendations for change.

Implementation of the Recommendations

The next step in the SCOPE process is to use the volunteer, citizen influence of SCOPE to seek implementation of the recommendations contained in the study report. This process includes the tasks of education, advocacy and monitoring. Education is aimed at increasing the awareness of the public, key decision makers and officials about the study. The advocacy efforts are recommendation specific and will help build public support or target key decision-makers regarding their capacity to implement a recommendation.

Over the next few months, a volunteer Implementation Task Force will develop an implementation plan, and some measurable objectives to assess progress. This task force will spend up to two years advancing the recommendations to appropriate decision-makers and organizations within the community. The task force will assess its progress at periodic intervals and report on the results of its efforts to the SCOPE Board and to the public.

The following summarizes some of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the SCOPE Mental Health Study Group.

Download a complete copy of the Dropout Report from www.scopexcel.org

OR

Request that a copy be mailed to you by calling SCOPE at 941-365-8751

KEY FINDINGS

- Over 15% of the burden of disease (i.e. the total impact of diseases on health and productivity) in established market economies is due to mental disorders, second only to cardiovascular disease.
- More than one in five Americans has a diagnosable mental illness. In Sarasota County: 27,065 people ages 18-54, and 28,561 people ages 55 and older have a diagnosable mental health disorder.
- An estimated 5,944 children ages 9-17 have a mental health or addictive disorder in Sarasota County. Twenty-one percent of high school students in Sarasota County report that they have seriously considered suicide, and 15% report that they have attempted suicide.
- Risk factors for developing any mental disorder may include biological and environmental factors. Risk factors include: genetic vulnerability, child abuse or neglect, parental mental health issues, early exposure to violence, racism and discrimination, and poverty.
- National data indicate that 35% of the population has an immediate family member with mental illness. Family members and caretakers often suffer emotional and physical consequences as a result of mental illness in a loved one.
- The average monthly income for a Floridian with a Severe and Persistent Mental Illness is \$554. The median monthly rent in Sarasota is \$711.
- National data indicate that it is up to six times more expensive to care for inmates with mental illnesses, and the average length of incarceration is longer. One study found that for the amount it costs to jail or hospitalize a single person for one year, Florida could provide medications and treatment for ten people with mental illnesses. The Sheriff's Office estimated that 20% of inmates in the Sarasota County jail have a serious mental illness, and over 11% of the jail population takes psychotropic medications.
- According to one estimate, 2,120 people have a serious mental illness and a co-occurring substance abuse disorder in Sarasota County. Another estimate suggests that over five times this many people have a co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorder in our community.
- There are an estimated 1,826 people who are homeless on any given day in Sarasota County. Twenty percent of homeless people surveyed in Sarasota County report having been in a detoxification or crisis stabilization unit. Research has demonstrated that providing service-enriched housing for homeless persons with mental illnesses leads to significant cost savings.
- Over 31% of the total population of Sarasota County is 65 or older. Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health issues among older adults. Less than one percent of depressed older adults will ask for help. Without treatment, depression in older adults can lead to physical illness, alcohol abuse, and suicide.

HIGHLIGHTS

Major Problems

- The mental health services system is fragmented and there is a lack of overall coordination, communication, and awareness of services. This leads to frustration and confusion for providers, clients, and families, and inefficient allocation of limited resources, both dollars and services.
- Mental health clients, family members, elected officials, and the community lack education, awareness, and acceptance of mental illness. This results in discrimination against clients, denial of illness, and avoidance of treatment.
- Over half of all Baker Acts in Sarasota County are initiated by law enforcement. Officers are not adequately prepared to handle encounters with persons with mental illnesses.
- Mental health services that address the specialized needs of older adults, minority and non-English speaking clients, clients who have been involved with the criminal justice system, clients with co-occurring addictive disorders, and family members of people with mental illnesses are very limited.
- Throughout the entire mental health services system, critical data related to outcomes, utilization, and need for services is not captured, not integrated, or not readily available.

Recommended Solutions

- Establish a Mental Health Coordinator Position and a Mental Health Stakeholders Consortium to develop a community plan for mental health services. The Coordinator should develop a comprehensive, centralized source of information about mental health services.
- Develop a public education campaign to reduce the stigma and fear associated with mental illness. Also expand local chapters of advocacy groups and establish a local speakers bureau to educate legislators and policy makers.
- The sheriff's department and municipal police departments should offer crisis intervention training to law enforcement officers.
- Develop and expand specialized mental health services for people with mental illnesses who have special needs, including:
 - Outreach, education, and advocacy for older adults
 - Culturally appropriate services, outreach, and language assistance for minority and non-English speaking clients
 - Treatment services in the jail, specialized services in the community, and monitoring for persons who have been involved with the criminal justice system
 - Screening, integrated treatment and aftercare programs for persons with co-occurring mental health and addictive disorders
 - Respite care, education, support groups, and opportunities for involvement of families
- Develop a data collection system that allows the county to evaluate and monitor the utilization of, need for, and effectiveness of mental health services.