



New Initiatives to Bridging Primary Care and Behavioral Health: Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics

This article focuses on a recent initiative designed to implement the key tenets of integrated behavioral health care in community mental health centers. The Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) program, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), allows states and regional service providers to test new strategies for delivering and being compensated for services. CCBHCs provide comprehensive, person-centered mental health and substance use services, including crisis services, for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis regardless of their ability to pay. CCBHC's aim is to expand access to care, improve service quality, and increase care coordination across the healthcare continuum. CCBHCs are mandated to reduce patient wait times, offer sliding-fee scale discounts for those who qualify, and serve as the hub for integrated behavioral health care.

CCBHCs are grounded in the principle of whole-person and patient-centered care, which acknowledges that mental and physical health are interconnected and that effective treatment requires attention to all aspects of a person's well-being. CCBHCs coordinate with primary care clinics to address the full range of factors that impact health, including social determinants such as housing, employment, and nutrition. A requirement for the primary care clinic partner is that the clinic needs to be a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), a medical hospital, a social service agency, or other community-based organization.

CCBHCs require nine (9) core services that exemplify the integrated behavioral approach. These services are listed as follows.

- 1** Crisis mental health services.
- 2** Screening, assessment, and diagnosis.
- 3** Person-centered treatment planning.
- 4** Outpatient mental health and substance use services.
- 5** Primary care screening and monitoring.
- 6** Targeted case management.
- 7** Psychiatric rehabilitation services.
- 8** Peer and family support.
- 9** Services for veterans and active-duty military.

Each of these services contributes to a continuum of care that considers immediate and long-term health needs. For example, primary care screening within a behavioral health setting enables early detection of chronic conditions, identifies when patient medication is needed, with side effect monitoring, and encourages screenings of HIV and Hepatitis. Case management services are required by CCBHCs to help clients navigate medical and behavioral health systems.

By emphasizing integration and whole-person care, CCBHC's aim is to transform the way communities deliver behavioral health services. Rather than treating mental illness or addiction in isolation, the model supports coordinated interventions that align with a person's physical health, social needs, and recovery goals. This holistic, wraparound support system model is especially critical for individuals with complex or co-occurring conditions, helping reduce hospitalizations, improve quality of life, and promote long-term recovery. As a result, CCBHCs enhance care for individuals and help build resilient and responsive healthcare systems at the community level.

A national evaluation of the impact of CCBHCs has yielded positive results. For example:

- Screening for clinical depression increased from the first demonstration year to the second demonstration year.
- Measures of process of care within CCBHCs (e.g., timely access to care and screening and assessment) improved from the first demonstration year to the second year.
- Rates of hospitalizations and emergency department visits decreased during the demonstration period compared with the baseline period (prior to the demonstration period).
- Rates of clients served by CCBHCs increased from the first demonstration year to the second demonstration year.
- During the demonstration period, the average cost billed to Medicaid per beneficiary per month was higher for CCBHCs (experimental group) compared with non-CCBHC clinics (comparison group).

Article Sources

The sources for creation of this article were:

Brown, J., Breslau, J., Wishon, A., Miller, R., Kase, C., Dunbar, M., Stewart, K., Briscoombe, B., Rose, T., Dehus, E., and DeWitt, K. (2022, November 1). Implementation and Impact of the Certified Community Health Clinic Demonstration: Findings from the National Evaluation. Prepared for The Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/60f121a777ee63b20008e43ad45518bf/ccbhc-implementation-impacts-findings.pdf>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2023, February). Certified Community Behavioral Health Center (CCBHC) Certification Criteria. Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/ccbhc-criteria-2023.pdf>

