

Pierce County Mental Health Crisis System Questions & Answers

1. Why is OptumHealth changing the mental health crisis system in Pierce County?

OptumHealth was retained by the State of Washington to develop a mental health system that will provide people in crisis with rapid response, 24-hour services and a complete range of inpatient and outpatient support services that create paths to recovery. The new system also allows the state to qualify for higher levels of federal funding than it has achieved in the past. This funding is vital in the current economic climate.

2. What are the differences in the new system?

The new delivery system will meet the needs of people who need mental health crisis services. It will include:

- Two 16 bed Evaluation and Treatment Centers that provides voluntary and involuntary in-patient mental health treatment to adults and adolescents.
- A 24-hour crisis hotline that provides immediate counseling or information.
- A Mobile Outreach Crisis Team that provides outreach to individuals anywhere in the county with additional short term Crisis Respite Beds.
- A new “Living Room” model of Crisis Triage care that combines traditional levels of medical and psychiatric care with a more home like environment. The program will provide short-term observation and treatment as an alternative to hospital and jails.

3. Who are the agencies that will provide services?

OptumHealth identified and recruited providers with strong track records in community-based mental health crisis programs, and experience in operating facilities in ways that meet federal funding requirements.

Currently, three service providers are expected to participate:

- MultiCare Good Samaritan Outreach Corporation and a coalition of local mental health agencies, for 24-hour mobile crisis outreach services, a planned 16-bed Evaluation and Treatment Center and community crisis respite beds. Pierce County residents will be able to call a single, centralized toll-free crisis line. A Mobile Outreach Crisis Team can also be dispatched as needed.
- Recovery Innovations Inc. for a Crisis Triage Center using the “Living Room” model described above.
- Telecare Mental Health Services of Washington for a 16-bed Evaluation and Treatment center. TeleCare specializes in services and supports for consumers with serious mental illness and complex needs, and provides a full spectrum of services including: Inpatient care, crisis support, residential programs and outpatient services.

4. What was the process for selecting the new agencies?

The agencies selected were evaluated by a panel that included independent third party mental health experts and consumer and family representatives. This was done through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and procurement process.

On July 1, 2009 OptumHealth issued the RFQ. Responses were due August 3 and the agencies selected were notified on August 21.

5. When does the new system begin?

New services begin on October 1, 2009.

6. What will happen with the crisis system between now and the October 1 start date?

A transition program has been established to ensure there will be no interruption of services for people needing care or for community and law enforcement agencies who count on the crisis system for support. OptumHealth will conduct extensive outreach throughout the community in coming weeks to ensure all parties are well informed and new protocols and processes are in place for a smooth transition on October 1.

7. What is going to happen to the crisis services used by law enforcement?

The procedures that law enforcement officers follow for obtaining crisis services will remain in place.

8. How does Pierce County, the current provider of mental health crisis services work in the transition plan?

Pierce County will maintain operations until October 1. By that time the new system will be in place. There will be a smooth transition so that care will always be available to those in need.

9. Where can I get more information?

For questions, please call OptumHealth Pierce County toll-free at 866-673-6256.