



## NEWS RELEASE

### **OPTUMHEALTH ANNOUNCES IMPROVEMENTS TO PIERCE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM**

*System Will Enhance Services for Community Members in Crisis, Earn More Federal Funding*

**TACOMA, Wash.**, August 21, 2009 — [OptumHealth Inc.](#) today announced details of an enhanced mental health crisis system for Pierce County residents. Working with the State of Washington, OptumHealth has developed a 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 allows the state to qualify for higher levels of federal mental health funding than it has achieved in the past, which is significant in the face of current state budget limitations.

“These changes will give people, regardless of the severity and complexity of their mental illness, services that can help lead to recovery and a meaningful life,” said Cheri Dolezal, executive director for OptumHealth Pierce County based in Tacoma. “The enhancements represent one piece of OptumHealth’s commitment to the State of Washington, and the citizens of Pierce County, to continue finding ways to transform mental health services, even during difficult financial periods.”

OptumHealth was retained in July 2009 by the State of Washington to improve and coordinate mental health services for Pierce County residents. With feedback from the community, OptumHealth developed a mental health crisis system that maintains and enhances existing essential services, while adding new, proven treatment options to support recovery. The effort 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:

- Recovery Innovations Inc., for a Crisis Triage Center using the “Living Room” model — a new system approach for Pierce County that combines traditional medical and psychiatric care with a home-like environment, and help from peer support specialists who have lived through similar experiences.
- 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.
- Telecare Mental Health Services of Washington, for a 16-bed Evaluation and Treatment center. Telecare specializes in serving those with serious, complex mental illness, and

provides a full spectrum of services, including inpatient care, crisis support, residential programs and outpatient services.

The agencies selected were evaluated by a panel that included independent third party mental health experts and consumer and family representatives.

“As a long-time citizen activist and advocate for persons with major mental illness, I was pleased to evaluate proposals submitted to OptumHealth for the delivery of mental health crisis services to individuals in Pierce County,” said Eleanor Owen, interim executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Greater Seattle affiliate. “Because a crisis is only one aspect of mental illness, I was most impressed with proposals that also focused on long-term support to help people reach recovery.”

New services will begin on October 1, 2009. 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.

“The State Department of Social and Health Services and OptumHealth are working with hospitals, providers and law enforcement agencies in the county to make sure that there will be no disruption of services,” said Doug Porter, Assistant Department of Social and Health Services Secretary. “Anyone who needs care should have access to the services they need during the transition.”

### **About OptumHealth**

OptumHealth Inc. helps individuals navigate the health care system, finance their health care needs and achieve their health and well-being goals. The company’s personalized health advocacy and engagement programs tap a unique combination of capabilities that encompass care solutions, behavioral solutions, specialty benefits and financial services. Serving nearly 60 million people, OptumHealth is one of the nation’s largest health and wellness businesses, and is a UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH) company. More information about OptumHealth can be found at [www.optumhealth.com](http://www.optumhealth.com).

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