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Substance Use Disorder Work at the Georgia Health Policy Center

The Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) has long used systems thinking tools and principles to help stakeholders gain a holistic perspective of issues, ask the right questions, focus on the physics and populations of the underlying system, and make mental models more explicit.

GHPC applies systems thinking to build a stronger, more robust, and integrated mindset for improved behavioral health and substance use disorder outcomes within Georgia and nationally. Given the broad range of causal factors and interventions, a systems approach can aid policymakers in informing multisector prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts. Further, GHPC believes a systems orientation encourages the strategic inclusion of public health as a key partner, promotes a long-term focus, and enables a health equity perspective.

In 2016, GHPC developed a systems map of elements and interactions underlying and affecting the opioid epidemic. The map was informed through interviews with state and federal health-related agencies, as well as individuals with lived experience. Using this map as a tool for systems-driven conversations fosters a deeper understanding of how the parts of the system interact, enabling a more comprehensive examination of substance use disorder, including contributing factors, affected populations, and intervention points.

Services	Specific Areas of Interest
Evaluation	Programmatic outcomes
Technical assistance	Evidence-based practices
Policy and economic analyses	Health system transformation
Meeting design and facilitation	Quality improvement
Strategic planning	Program implementation support
Systems mapping and modeling	Integration of mental health, addiction services

Project Examples

Facilitation of Georgia Department of Public Health's Opioid Strategic Plan

GHPC drew upon its substantial experience with systems thinking, strategic planning, health systems transformation, and facilitating data-driven, goals-based meetings and processes with state agencies and community-based organizations in order to provide facilitation and support to the Georgia Department of Public Health as it developed Georgia's opioid response strategic plan.

A two-day strategic planning meeting was held in December 2017 with participation from 200 stakeholders representing 90 state and local organizations. The strategic planning process was based on systems mapping of the opioid epidemic. Meeting participants informed the goals, objectives, and action agenda in the strategic plan, as well as measures of success. Following the meeting, GHPC provided additional support for development of the final strategic plan, as well as facilitation of a 400-person meeting in August 2018 to unveil the strategic plan.



Evidence Review of Treatment Services

Ireland's Health Research Board engaged GHPC to conduct a rapid realist review on the treatment of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder services. The evidence review identifies treatment interventions that are associated with positive outcomes in patients with co-occurring addiction and mental health disorders, as well as approaches to integrating mental health and addiction services associated with improved outcomes for people with dual diagnoses. The review informs development of a standardized, evidence-based approach to the identification, assessment, and treatment of comorbid mental illness and substance use disorder.

The review included a systematic literature search, as well as engagement with knowledge users representing both providers and service users. This restructured model of care will ensure that all adolescents and adults having moderate to severe mental illness co-occurring with significant substance use disorder have access to a timely behavioral health service.



Recovery Support Clubhouses

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) Division of Addictive Diseases oversees nine Recovery Support Clubhouses for youth and young adults aged 13 to 21 years with substance use diagnoses. The Recovery Support Clubhouses utilize a comprehensive substance abuse recovery support model designed to engage adolescents and their families in their own recovery.

The Center of Excellence for Children's Behavioral Health at GHPC works with DBHDD's Office of Addictive Disease to evaluate the Recovery Support Clubhouse model and monitor youth outcomes over time. The evaluation uses secondary data collected by clubhouse staff to examine programmatic outputs and outcomes to support reporting to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, with the ultimate goal of improving program quality. Additionally, the Center of Excellence provides financing and policy research, and implementation support to the clubhouses to ensure continuous quality improvement.

