

Tampa Bay Thrives, a Regional Mental Wellness Coalition

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49%

of the 3.8 million people living in the four-county region of Western Florida are on Medicare.

Executive Summary

In Tampa Bay and West Central Florida, 1 in 6 people live with depression and 1 in 12 have a substance use disorder. Local hospitals and their communities are grappling with record numbers of suicide attempts and overdoses. Florida ranks eighth in the U.S. in prevalence of mental illness and 48th in access to mental health care, according to Mental Health America’s report “The State of Mental Health in America.”

On June 20, 2019, leaders from BayCare along with AdventHealth, HCA Healthcare, Tampa General Hospital, behavioral health providers, law enforcement, government agencies, schools and leading corporations developed a regional mental health initiative called the West Central Florida Mental Wellness Coalition to improve outcomes for depression, anxiety and substance use disorders in the region with a focus on early intervention, access and awareness.

With \$5.3 million in voluntary contributions, the coalition shortly thereafter was founded as the nonprofit Tampa Bay Thrives. Immediate priorities focused on:



With a broad representation of health care systems, agencies, elected officials, insurance companies, large employers and community service agencies, leaders recognized that they needed to do more, they could do more and they needed to work together to make it happen. When the pandemic hit and access to behavioral health support became more important than ever, this diverse coalition was able to provide services to address the physical health and mental health needs of the community.

Community Profile

The [3.8 million](#) people living in the four-county region of Western Florida, including Tampa Bay, include a mix of 74% white and 26% nonwhite residents with a generally higher percentage of Medicare beneficiaries than that of the nation (49%), in large part due to the retiree population in Florida. With 8-10% uninsured and 15% using Medicaid, this region has a higher rate of mental health needs and substance use disorder-related overdose deaths than the nation overall. Ravi Chari, M.D., coalition board member and president of HCA’s West Florida division, said, “The numbers of suicides and overdose deaths are increasing.”

Network Development

Tampa Bay Thrives (formerly the West Central Florida Mental Wellness Coalition) is a community collaborative that addresses the rise in mental illness and substance use disorders for those living in Pinellas, Pasco, Hillsborough and Polk counties in Western Florida.

BayCare is the largest provider of health services in this region and a major provider of behavioral health care services with a full-service line, more than 300 inpatient behavioral health care beds, multiple ambulatory and outpatient locations and an electronic patient transfer and referral center to assist with patient placement throughout the system. Even with these resources, the board was concerned that mental illness and substance use disorders were on the rise in the community and asked BayCare President and CEO Tommy Inzina to identify the best approach for BayCare to respond. “They hit me with what felt like an out-of-the-blue discussion about curing world hunger,” Inzina said.

Health care systems were seen as competitors rather than collaborators, and this was a social cause that could unify all organizations.

NETWORK: Tampa Bay Thrives	
Primary focus	Bringing together community leaders to address mental illness and substance use disorder treatment needs in the community.
Network partners	Health care provider organizations, insurers, schools, law enforcement, elected officials, community action agencies and county government leaders.
Aligns with CHNA*	Yes
Legal entity	501c(3)
Started	2019
Staffing	Initially, five to six senior leaders at BayCare with facilitation support from a consultant; the coalition hired a president/CEO, Carrie Zeisse, to build out the organization.
Initial capitalization	Projected initial capital requirement of \$10 million based on \$1.5-\$2 million per year for a three-year ramp-up for staff, physical space and consulting infrastructure. \$5.3 million raised with 50% match by BayCare.
Funders	AdventHealth, BayCare, Florida Blue, HCA Healthcare, Tampa General Hospital, The Mosaic Company Foundation, Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation, Rays Baseball Foundation, Clearwater Police Department, Dimmitt Family Foundation and Pasco County Sheriff's Office.
Ongoing funding	After startup, the organization will be self-sustaining with ongoing funding through community foundation and philanthropy support.
Role of BayCare	Leader/convener/advocate/funder.
Behavioral health service-line leader role	Direct participant/leader. This was a community vs. service line initiative.
Unique element of network	Not a service provider of behavioral health, but a connector of services and resources to address the behavioral and physical health needs of the community. The organization is now driving the integration of physical and behavioral health in the Tampa Bay area.

*Community Health Needs Assessment

Under Inzina's direction, BayCare sponsored a task force and convened more than 30 community leaders to discuss and plan a response. Initially, senior leaders at BayCare engaged a consultant to facilitate their work, first sharing the data on the magnitude of the problem and then reviewing profiles of other communities to identify best practices.

After these initial steps, Inzina reached out and invited relevant community leaders and organizations to participate in the task force. All were interested in coming together around their common frustration about the lack of coordination and resources in the mental health care system.

Health care systems were seen as competitors rather than collaborators, and this was a social cause that could unify all organizations. Clara Reynolds, coalition board member and CEO of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, a community agency providing multiple crisis response services, said, "There are lots of organizations in this space — the difficulty is navigating it and not trying to compete or replace. We need to address overall stigma and raise awareness."

40%
With the pandemic, the percentage of U.S. adults reported struggling with behavioral health issues.

Tampa Bay Thrives Goals

- **Navigation** — Raise awareness of where to go for services.
- **Behavioral health urgent care** — Develop options for treatment other than the emergency department (ED).
- **Public awareness** — Reduce discrimination and stigma around behavioral health care services.
- **Public safety** — Reduce the number of inappropriate Baker Act referrals (Florida Mental Health Act of 1971 [Florida Statute 394.451-394.47891]) involving emergency or involuntary commitment.

Key Learnings and Takeaways

Tampa Bay Thrives leaders generally agreed on three essential components for the community collaborative.

1 A true coalition requires the buy-in and endorsement of a broad range of community leaders.

2 There is a need for several think tanks or design sessions with all leaders and stakeholders.

3 A leader is required, at least initially, to jump-start the initiative.

Barriers Experienced

- Members lacked a unified understanding of behavioral health care resources and the needs in the community — “We didn’t know what we didn’t know.”
- Some key agency and community leaders were not involved, and not having the consumer and family perspective during the initial effort created unnecessary confusion and lack of alignment with the early efforts.
- There were concerns that members would be unable to reach a consensus and revert to the old ways of doing things.

Impact of Initiative on COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

With the pandemic, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with behavioral health challenges, including both mental and substance use disorders. In the Tampa Bay area, when the pandemic hit and access to behavioral health support became more important than ever, Tampa Bay Thrives provided 24/7 access to behavioral health navigation through a dedicated phone line staffed by mental health professionals who not only assessed needs and directed people to the right help, but also delivered virtual behavioral urgent care with licensed mental health professionals.

While Tampa Bay Thrives is still in its infancy, David Pizzo, market president for Florida Blue, the largest private health insurer in the region, noted the benefits of addressing the lack of coordination of services and addressing stigma.

Future Specific Measures

- Screening patients so they receive services in the appropriate setting the first time around.
- Decreasing the number of recurring visits to the ED.
- Reducing urgent admissions for behavioral health care illness and preventable hospital readmissions.

Tampa Bay Thrives also has prioritized reducing the stigma around behavioral health conditions that can prevent individuals from seeking treatment, which contributes to poor outcomes. By reducing stigma, individuals can feel comfortable seeking care for behavioral health concerns, just as they would for physical health concerns.

It is now driving the integration of physical and behavioral health in the Tampa Bay area. Like others, it is connecting and offering resources virtually to those in need and working on integrating behavioral health urgent care into its existing physical health urgent care to keep individuals out of the ED.

This collaboration on behavioral health among the four CEOs of traditionally competing hospitals and health systems and the relationships forged with the health department, school districts and law enforcement laid a foundation to address community needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Established work groups were able to pivot and create a dashboard of supply and demand for personal protective equipment, hospital beds and intensive care unit capacity across the various health care systems/hospitals. As economic instability and racial tensions have exacerbated physical and behavioral health challenges, Tampa Bay Thrives is playing an important role in coordinating services to those in need.

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