



SAMHSA'S PROGRAM TO ACHIEVE WELLNESS

Incorporating Wellness Into Recovery

Rutger's University Behavioral Health Care Adds a New Initiative to Their Wellness Lineup Addressing the Unmet Needs of Veterans

Many of our country's veterans struggle to get the medical care they need and deserve. Rutgers' University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC) was recently awarded a grant from the NJ Department of Health to pilot a program to address unmet health care needs of New Jersey veterans. The UBHC Veterans Total Care Initiative (VTCI) comes on the heels of a recent report by the Department of Veterans Affairs Inspector General, revealing that an estimated 307,000 veterans may have died while their health care enrollment was pending. The innovative pilot program, which has received funding for six months, offers free primary care, behavioral health treatment, and peer support to veterans, in addition to providing linkage to housing, employment, and other services addressing the social determinants of health. UBHC has partnered with the Rutgers, New Jersey Medical School in Newark and the Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick to connect veterans in need with integrated health teams. A UBHC behavioral health professional and peer veteran are embedded in the primary care offices to ensure that a **person-centered, veteran-centric whole health approach to recovery** is delivered.



Veterans Total Care Initiative (VTCI) Project Team at Rutgers, New Jersey Medical School

Access to the VTCI project is available through a **peer veteran-operated helpline (1-866-838-7654)**. A peer veteran meets and greets individuals referred for their initial appointment at the primary care office and helps ensure the veteran feels all his/her needs are addressed. Same day appointments are available when needed; and an individualized person-centered care plan is developed with each individual served in order to address the [Eight Dimensions of Wellness](#). In addition, **peer veterans have been trained in the chronic disease self-management model**; fostering self-care with persons served by the project.

This new grant is just one example of how the work of UBHC keeps growing to meet the ever-evolving needs of the people they serve; and how **UBHC infuses wellness and integrated care throughout their**

services. UBHC has blazed the trail integrating physical and behavioral health care for over a decade. UBHC realized that people they served with serious mental illness (SMI) were dying over 25 years earlier than their peers were; before the October 2006 National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) [technical report](#) on morbidity and mortality illuminated these staggering statistics for the nation. UBHC witnessed this firsthand as they saw their clients dying too young of “natural causes” that seemed more avoidable than natural. Rather than stand idly by, **UBHC established a physical health subcommittee** in 2004 to incorporate physical health into the culture of their work, from the high ranks of leadership to the direct care staff working to improve lives on a daily basis.

The physical health subcommittee has implemented many positive changes. For example, “wellness stations” have been created in many UBHC clinical programs. These stations **empower consumers to take care of their own health**. They can track their own health measures including BMI, weight, and waist circumference at the stations. The physical health subcommittee also selects a health “topic of the month” such as nutrition, men’s health issues, and alcohol awareness, among others; and develops resources to address the monthly topic with consumers. September is always dedicated to [National Wellness Week](#), when UBHC addresses wellness with dozens of activities that address all Eight Dimensions of Wellness, holding events like Wellness Fairs, walk breaks, healthy heart lunches, and more.



“Going Green”: Addressing the Environmental Dimension of Wellness during Wellness Week celebration at UBHC

UBHC’s work extends beyond New Jersey, where they have now become **nationally recognized leaders in behavioral health care and in integrated care** designed to improve the lives of people with the most serious mental health and economic challenges. Rutgers UBHC is dedicated to excellence in providing behavioral health services to the people of New Jersey; and is committed to being a leader in the delivery of effective, compassionate, and accessible care that is informed by research and education.

The work of UBHC has an enormous impact in New Jersey, where, annually, they:

- Serve 12,800 consumers;
- Conduct 193,200 outpatient visits;
- Conduct 2,100 psychiatric emergency room (ER) visits;
- Conduct 10,700 inpatient days (adult and child); and
- Facilitate 139,000 calls to Access Center Services.

We would like to thank Betty Vreeland, Kathy Cherwinski, and Michele Miller at UBHC for taking time to talk with the Program to Achieve Wellness about their programs, achievements, and challenges. For more information about their work, please visit <http://ubhc.rutgers.edu>.