



Hawai'i Primary Care Association

Beth Giesting, CEO, 808-791-7820, bgiesting@hawaiiipca.net

Community Health Centers and Mental Health

The most cost-effective way the Legislature can bolster the capacity of CHC mental health services and improve the health in underserved communities is to approve prescriptive authority for specially trained psychologists working in collaboration with physicians at Community Health Centers.

Community Health Centers (CHCs) provide a comprehensive array of primary care services that include mental health. In fact, in their underserved communities, CHCs are the *de facto* mental health system. **Mental health care at CHCs is provided in an integrated manner by a team of professionals providing a continuum of care from basic to intensive.** This team includes the primary medical care clinician who can refer patients with mental health needs to a psychologist or licensed clinical social worker. By “integration” we mean that medical and mental health clinicians work from a common set of protocols and refer patients back and forth as appropriate to the needs of the patient, and frequently communicate with each other about their care and management.

Ideally, the integrated team would be supported by consultation with a psychiatrist on treatment decisions who is also available to provide direct clinical care to patients who are seriously mentally ill. **Unfortunately, a psychiatrist is often not included in the CHC team because of the limited resources available to the CHC and the shortage of psychiatrists.** Currently, CHCs in Hawai'i employ 22 psychologists, 16 licensed clinical social workers, and 10 other licensed or certified behavioral health workers. In addition, CHCs employ or contract with 8 psychiatrists, 7 of whom are on the island of O'ahu working with large CHCs.

In aggregate, CHCs serve 110,000 people per year but fewer than 10% of them are receiving mental health services. This represents only a fraction of the need in the communities served, which, arguably, are at higher risk for mental health and substance abuse services than most others. According to 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data compiled by the Department of Health, **31.9% of all adults in Hawai'i reported poor mental health during the 30 day period preceding the survey.** Honolulu County had the highest rate— 33% of the population reported poor mental health— but Hawai'i County, at 32.4%, wasn't far behind. The groups most affected were:

- Individuals between 18 and 24 years of age (38.5%)
- Ethnicity reported as “other” (36.7%), followed by Filipino (34.5%)
- High school being highest education level attained (34.0%)
- Unemployed (44.3%)

According to data reported to the federal government in 2007, CHC mental service volumes were as follows:

	Number of Individuals	Number of Encounters
Depression and other mood disorders	3,780	17,786
Anxiety disorders including PTSD	1,909	6,035
Attention deficit and disruptive behavior disorders	619	2,755
Other mental disorders, excluding drug or alcohol dependence	4,329	16,917
Alcohol and other substance abuse disorders, excluding tobacco use.	1,561	8,532