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Subject: Recommendations to Transform SC's Behavioral Health System Released

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Recommendations to transform and improve our state's behavioral health systems have been issued by a statewide taskforce convened by the South Carolina Institute of Medicine & Public Health (IMPH). These recommendations include actions to make behavioral health care as accessible as care for physical illnesses, such as a heart attack or trauma, and to integrate primary and behavioral health care in order to reduce overall health care costs and improve health outcomes.

The 20 recommendations outlined in the report, [Hope for Tomorrow: The Collective Approach for Transforming South Carolina's Behavioral Health Systems](#), are the culmination of 18 months of work by a [statewide taskforce](#) of over 60 public and private behavioral health providers, researchers and advocates guided by a 20-member Steering Committee. IMPH convened these stakeholders to identify the most significant challenges in our behavioral health systems and provide actionable, evidence-based and cost-effective strategies to provide better care and access for behavioral health services for residents of South Carolina.

Chaired by the executive director of IMPH, Kester S. Freeman, Jr., the taskforce created a bold vision for behavioral health in South Carolina based on two focal points: the need for *crisis stabilization services* available at all hours and the need for an improved, more accessible system of *chronic care management*. The vision depicts a future in which all residents of South Carolina will have equal access to behavioral health services regardless of their individual means or where they live in the state. The actionable recommendations resulting from this vision outline a collective approach for transforming South Carolina's behavioral health systems.

Additional highlights of the report include:

- Residents of South Carolina must have access to crisis stabilization services at all hours. The absence of such services amplifies the burden of crisis for individuals and families and strains existing community systems and resources.
- Investment is needed for a more accessible system of chronic care

- management, which may be achieved through an array of public and private services.
- An analysis of the significant need for more supportive housing for people with serious behavioral health illnesses across the state.
- A case study highlighting how one community, Spartanburg County, is creatively changing its behavioral health care system to address the unmet needs of residents.

Freeman, the former CEO of Palmetto Health, said, “The Behavioral Health Taskforce sought to improve the lives of individuals with behavioral health illnesses and their families by addressing the need for expanded services and supports in a number of environments. With the implementation of these recommendations will come a sustainable and successful system of behavioral health care in the state of South Carolina.”

The urgency of addressing behavioral health illnesses extends beyond the individual and their families to the impact on communities and systems. Those broader implications of behavioral health were a focus of the Behavioral Health Taskforce.

“Behavioral health illnesses increase the likelihood of a person becoming homeless or incarcerated. Such disorders are also a significant driver of emergency department utilization. Early intervention and treatment in the appropriate setting can save money and lives,” stated Maya Pack, IMPH Associate Director of Research and Strategic Initiatives. “The spirit of collaboration among the taskforce members allowed the group to pinpoint challenges in the current system and collectively work to develop recommendations to impact the system in order to serve patients, families and communities.”

The full report is available at www.imph.org/Hope4Tmrw.

For more information, please contact: Maya Pack (lead report author) at 864-238-0554 or maya@imph.org.

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