



Hogg Foundation *for* Mental Health

ADVANCING RECOVERY AND WELLNESS IN TEXAS

**Joint Senate Committees Hearing
Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs & Homeland Security and Committee on Education
January 28th, 2013
School Safety and Preventing Violence**

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health is part of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin. Since 1940 the foundation has been advancing mental wellness in Texas through research, education, services and public policy.

We are encouraged that the state is engaging in conversations about what can be done to improve the mental health and wellness of Texans. It is important, however, to recognize that people experiencing mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violent acts than the perpetrators of violent acts. These discussions should focus on how to create culture changes that result in increased safety for all Texans.

There are actions that can be taken to create culture changes within our school systems and our health and human services systems – actions that focus on prevention and early treatment, improve access to needed services, and promote wellness and recovery. While a number of the recent tragic events have been committed by teenagers or young adults highlighting the need to identify at-risk children and youth, it is also important to ensure that appropriate services and supports are available to adults.

There are services and programs that can be implemented that can help troubled children, youth and adults, and we need to move forward on these actions sooner rather than later. What we don't need to do is initiate another study or charge an advisory committee, council or taskforce to make recommendations that will take a year to develop. Research and experience have shown us what works and we need to move forward with implementing proven practices as soon as possible.

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health recommends the following actions:

1. Institute school-wide positive behavior support interventions and supports (PBIS) in all elementary, middle, and high schools in Texas. PBIS promotes student social, emotional and behavioral health. It is an evidenced-based practice that uses a three-tiered approach to teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors for all students.
2. Train teachers across Texas to better identify children and youth experiencing emotional disturbance or at-risk of engaging in dangerous activity.
3. Develop strong anti-bullying policies and prevention programs.
4. Expand school health programs including school mental health services.

5. Ensure that school counselors spend the majority of their time engaging with students, not administering standardized tests.
6. Expand the Youth Empowerment Services (YES) waiver statewide to ensure that intensive community supports and services are available to children with serious emotional disturbance.
7. Conduct statewide outreach and public awareness campaigns to de-stigmatize mental illness making it more likely that individuals and families will seek mental health services when needed. Develop outreach strategies directed specifically to youth.
8. Increase awareness of the impact of trauma on children, youth and adults. Provide a wide-range of training for both service providers and caregivers.
9. Increase suicide awareness and prevention.
10. Ensure that mental health community safety-net services are in place and available early and on an on-going basis to increase opportunities for individuals to receive services and prevent the need for crisis intervention.
11. Address mental health workforce issues including expanding the use of certified peer specialists, certified family partners and veteran peer support.
12. Increase integrated health care across the state. The majority of Texans will first seek assistance from a primary care provider. Primary care providers and mental health providers must increase opportunities for integrated services to ensure that those needing mental health services actually receive them.
13. Increase the availability of permanent supportive housing to prevent the frequent cycling through emergency rooms, jails, state psychiatric hospitals and homelessness.

The Hogg Foundation is eager to talk to you further about these recommendations. For additional information, please contact Colleen Horton, Policy Program Officer, at 512/471-2988 or colleen.horton@austin.utexas.edu.