

PROFILES IN INNOVATION



Leon Evans is president and chief executive officer of the Center for Health Care Services in San Antonio, Texas, a nonprofit that provides health and social services to individuals with mental health, developmental disability, and substance abuse challenges in Bexar County. He previously served as the director of community services for the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

ABOUT THE INNOVATOR

A passionate and lifelong advocate for improving the quality of mental health care, Leon Evans has worked in hospitals, community organizations, and state agencies throughout his career. As head of the Center for Health Care Services for over a decade, he developed an award-winning jail diversion program and has become a national leader in improving mental health care through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Leon Evans' passion for working with complex populations originated during his sophomore year as a business and finance major at the University of Oklahoma, when he began volunteering on the children's unit of a nearby state mental health hospital. "I fell in love with the children there, and changed my major to special education and psychology the next semester." He continued his work with complex and special-needs populations, working with medically fragile individuals at a state-run center for individuals with developmental disabilities, and conducting research on autism at a university lab.

He moved to Texas in the 1970s to help establish community mental health centers as part of a National Institute of Mental Health initiative, eventually entering the field of public mental health administration as director of community services for the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. It was here that Mr. Evans grew "painfully aware of the criminalization of the mentally ill," and decided he wanted to do something about this growing issue.

In 2000, he joined the Center for Health Care Services in Bexar County (San Antonio), Texas, and immediately got to work on a jail diversion program aimed at keeping individuals with mental illness from entering the criminal justice system. By developing a dedicated staff and bringing together community stakeholders, Mr. Evans also helped to create a Crisis Care Center; a Restoration Center offering sobering, detox, and intensive substance abuse services; and a partnership with local law enforcement officers who receive crisis intervention training.

Mr. Evans' work around systems change has garnered national attention, as he continues to advocate for improved integration of physical health, behavioral health, and social services, as well as "therapeutic justice" for people with severe mental illness. The Center for Health Care Services was recently awarded a Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) grant, which will be used to establish a primary care clinic and employ health navigators in Prospects Courtyard, a safe sleeping area for homeless residents of Bexar County who are struggling with mental health and substance use challenges. The program will integrate primary care with the Courtyard's previously existing mental health clinic and services. The project will be rolled out over a three-year period, with the aim of improving health, quality of life, and self-management among high-risk homeless individuals, while simultaneously reducing their health care costs.

"Lack of funding, poor communication between hospital emergency rooms and law enforcement, no specialized training, and the lack of a system designed to overcome these barriers mean that hundreds of thousands of people with severe mental illness end up in our emergency rooms, jails, prisons, or homeless on our streets."

The Center for Health Care Strategies' Complex Care Innovation Lab, made possible by Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit, is bringing together leading innovators working to improve care for vulnerable populations with complex medical and social needs. Participants will explore new ways to advance complex care delivery at the local, state and national level. These profiles highlight Innovation Lab participants. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.

ABOUT THE INNOVATION

The Center for Health Care Services' Prospects Courtyard

Program Description: Prospects Courtyard is a safe outdoor sleeping area, operated by the Center for Health Care Services, as part of Haven for Hope, San Antonio's comprehensive center for the homeless. The Courtyard is for individuals who are not yet ready to take the substance-free pledge necessary to enter the Haven for Hope treatment program. It also provides guests with basic medical services, communal showers, and meals. A mental health clinic housed at the Courtyard offers psychiatric care and administers medicines. The CMMI grant will be used to establish an enhanced care support program for a subset of high-risk individuals staying at Prospects Courtyard. A primary care clinic will be established on site, and the program will hire and train 24 health care navigators to support individuals in accessing and coordinating health care and managing their health.

Population: Approximately 260 homeless adult residents of Bexar County, staying at Prospects Courtyard, who have severe mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder, and are at risk for chronic medical conditions. These individuals are identified by health care navigators working at the Courtyard, or through referrals from psychiatric clinics.

Delivery Model: Individuals can enter Prospects Courtyard anytime between 8 am and 10 pm, and can stay indefinitely without a commitment to treatment. Health navigators and physicians at the Courtyard clinic work to engage with guests, learn about their lives and health issues, invite them into the clinics for care, and develop trusting relationships. Once engaged, health care navigators work with patients to ensure they receive consistent care, stabilize their social needs, and improve their health and well-being.

Financing: The primary care integration and health navigator program is being financed through a three-year, \$4.6 million CMMI grant. Through improved health outcomes and reduced hospital admissions and emergency room visits, the program aims to save Medicaid over \$5 million over three years. Funding for the program will be sustained through opportunities in the Affordable Care Act, as well as local revenue sources.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. **Value-driven staff**, instilled with a fundamental belief in and commitment to meeting the needs of individuals with behavioral health needs;
2. **Flexibility to meet people where they are**, using non-traditional methods of engagement and treatment;
3. **Creativity** to work within a challenging financial and political environment; and
4. **Strong leadership and partnerships** with community organizations, based on mutual trust and openness.

Spotlight: Bexar County Jail Diversion Program

Recognizing that hundreds of mentally ill individuals were ending up in Bexar County's prisons every month for minor and nonviolent offenses, the Center for Health Care Services formed a community collaborative with the county's law enforcement, criminal justice, health, and community agencies to develop a solution to this problem. More than a decade later, the collaborative now functions as a sophisticated public mental health system that keeps nearly 1,100 people per month from ending up in jail or the emergency room. The Center for Health Care Services and its partners offer six key resources to prevent criminal justice involvement among the mentally ill:

1. **Community crisis line** to link callers with available resources in the county;
2. **Mobile crisis teams** based in the county Sheriff's Office and San Antonio Police Department that use both law enforcement and Center for Health Care Services staff to respond to crises;
3. **Mandatory crisis intervention training for law enforcement officers** that helps officers to identify, stabilize, and safely de-escalate individuals with mental health needs;
4. **Redesigned mental health docket** that embeds Center for Health Care Services staff into the pre-trial process to help screen and make treatment and disposition recommendations;
5. **Crisis Care Center** that is open to the public and law enforcement 24-hours/day, and provides a sobering area, a detox and counseling area, and onsite mental health/drug court;
6. **Restoration Center** that provides sobering, detox, and ongoing substance use treatment services to homeless and severely mentally ill individuals.

This range of interventions and proven successes have made Bexar County's Jail Diversion Program a nationally-recognized model for keeping individuals with mental illness from inappropriately entering the criminal justice system.