

2414 Bull Street/P.O. Box 485, Columbia, SC 29202

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 21, 2018

Contact: Tracy LaPointe
Phone: (803) 898-8582
E-mail: tracy.lapointe@scdmh.org

The Duke Endowment Reinvests in SC Department of Mental Health Telehealth Programs

Columbia, SC – The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) has received grant awards from The Duke Endowment (TDE) to support expansion of its Telepsychiatry services and School Mental Health programs in the amounts of \$600,000 and \$1.2 Million over three years, respectively. These two new awards bring TDE’s total investment in SCDMH services to \$12.8 Million since 2007.

A \$600,000 award from TDE will help to fund the addition of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) to SCDMH’s Community Telepsychiatry program. There is both a national and State shortage of psychiatrists. The Department has 60 community mental health clinics throughout South Carolina. The Department’s use of telehealth technology has enabled it to more efficiently and effectively use its limited number of psychiatrists by doing away with the need for its psychiatrists to travel between the Agency’s multiple outpatient locations. Utilizing APRNs with the authority to prescribe medication under the supervision of a psychiatrist is another established method that SCDMH has been using to serve the increasing numbers of citizens in need of psychiatric care. SCDMH will use the TDE funds to essentially combine these two means of extending the reach of its psychiatrists, and recruit additional psychiatric APRNs to serve patients of its community mental health clinics via its existing telepsychiatry network.

“The demand and need for psychiatrist services continues to grow, but recruitment of psychiatrists is a challenge nationwide,” said State Director John H. Magill. “These funds will allow SCDMH to bolster its Community Telepsychiatry staff and allow the Program to continue to expand and serve more patients.”

The \$1.2 Million School Mental Health Services grant from TDE will help SCDMH implement a countywide school mental telehealth initiative integrating mental health and primary health care for children in Darlington County. SCDMH’s Pee Dee Community Mental Health Center, in partnership with the Medical University of South Carolina, the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance, the Darlington One school district, and several local private providers, will make multiple healthcare services available in participating schools. Increased access to healthcare services for students and families is expected to improve student health, reduce absenteeism, and correspondingly improve student achievement.

“Our goal is to increase access and extend the reach of existing providers, while also building additional service capacity,” said Louise Johnson, SCDMH director of Child and Adolescent Services. “This project will allow us to address the long waits students in this mostly rural area face for evaluations, assessments, and treatment, while also providing prevention and combating stigma – providing the ability to cohesively address any and every area of a child’s life which could possibly negatively impact academic success.”

“SCDMH is not only the largest provider of telepsychiatry services in South Carolina, it is also the largest provider of telehealth services in South Carolina,” said Stewart Cooner, SCDMH director of Special Programs & Telepsychiatry. “The Duke Endowment’s support has made it possible for this Agency to utilize technology to reach people in the most rural parts of our state, decrease emergency room wait times and hospital admissions, and provide more holistic care. SCDMH is on track to provide 100,000 psychiatric services via telemedicine by the end of 2018

(more)

alone, and I believe that we are still in the beginning as far as identifying the ways in which video technology can improve the lives of those we serve.”

“We are pleased to have the opportunity to support this important work,” said Lin Hollowell, director of Health Care at The Duke Endowment. “Unfortunately, the mental health needs within the Carolinas continue to escalate. While we have made tremendous progress in building innovative approaches to meet the growing needs, more capacity is required. We are excited about the opportunity to leverage the resources that DMH has developed so that we can extend primary and preventative services into schools and other community settings.”

The South Carolina Department of Mental Health’s mission is to support the recovery of people with mental illnesses, giving priority to adults with serious and persistent mental illness and to children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. The Agency serves approximately 100,000 citizens with mental illnesses, approximately 30,000 of whom are children and adolescents, and provides outpatient services through a network of seventeen community mental health centers and numerous clinics. It also operates multiple inpatient hospitals, including one for substance use treatment, one community nursing care center, and three veterans’ nursing homes.

###