

## NO. 2: USING TELEHEALTH AND PARENT AND YOUTH PEERS ON MOBILE RESPONSE TEAMS TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE ISSUES IN RURAL AREAS

*Mobile response teams that deploy telehealth and parent and youth peers can mitigate geographic barriers and workforce limitations in rural areas, where mental health services are often scarce.*

### Background

Telehealth allows health care professionals to remotely deliver health care services, education, and public health services using telecommunication and digital technologies. Such technologies have been utilized increasingly in recent years due to several factors, including the need to improve access to health care services in rural areas where there are often shortages of providers. Telehealth has helped to address these shortages, which were exacerbated during the COVID pandemic, by allowing providers to reach individuals in remote locations without having to travel.

Parent and youth peers with lived experience can provide valuable support and guidance to families and youth struggling with mental health challenges. Parent and youth peer support on mobile response teams can be particularly important in rural areas, where mental health services may be scarce or non-existent and where stigma may discourage people from seeking care.

Mobile response teams of parent and youth peers with lived experience have been shown to mitigate workforce shortages in rural areas related to mental and behavioral health for children, youth, young adults, and their families. Benefits include:

- Supporting children, youth, young adults, parents, and caregivers, which can help them feel more comfortable seeking care and improve treatment outcomes.
- Filling gaps in the health care workforce by providing services that do not require a medical degree, such as identifying resources and linking to community services and supports.
- Reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues by providing services in a more informal, community-based setting.

Mobile response teams that utilize both telehealth and parent and youth peer support can sometimes be more efficient and effective than traditional models of care, particularly in rural areas where transportation and distance pose significant barriers to accessing care. Oklahoma has leveraged both telehealth and parent and youth peer support to sustainably address workforce issues in rural and frontier areas of the state.

- **Example:** The [Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services](#) (ODMHSAS) pairs iPad technology with [MyCare](#) integrated software, providing on-demand telehealth access to behavioral health services for the stabilization of children, youth, and families. First responders, community sites such as public health departments and schools, and caregivers and families whose children have behavioral health needs are equipped with cellular-enabled iPads loaded with the MyCare virtual visit platform. There are currently nearly 30,000 such devices in use across the state.



The NASMHPD - TTI Knowledge Bites [webinar series](#) was produced by the [National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors](#) in 2023. Each webinar is accompanied by a Knowledge Bite summarizing recommendations, community examples, and resources.

The MyCare platform provides immediate access to psychiatrists, Licensed Mental Health Professionals, nurse practitioners, care coordinators, and family support providers, allowing them the ability to easily assign and review screenings, assessments, and documents, and to access electronic medical records (EMRs) from within the app – even during a video session. Bidirectional data integration allows individuals and families to view upcoming appointments, access members of their care team, and request a call back. They can also sign documents and complete screenings and assessments that feed back into the EMR. The software tracks data related to crisis calls, including volume and average call duration, providing the state with information that is useful in staffing and deploying resources.

Parent support and training, delivered by family support providers (FSPs), is designed to benefit Medicaid-eligible children experiencing a serious emotional disturbance who are in an ODMHSAS-contracted system of care (OKSOC) community-based treatment program and who, without these services, would require psychiatric hospitalization. Parent support ensures the engagement and active participation of the family in the treatment planning process and guides families toward taking a proactive role in their child's treatment. Parent training helps families gain the skills and knowledge to facilitate an awareness of their child's needs by developing and enhancing the family's specific problem-solving skills, coping mechanisms, and strategies for the child's symptom/behavior management.

FSPs are an integral part of the OKSOC and must have lived experience as the primary caregiver of a child or youth who 1) has received services for serious emotional disturbance; 2) is the recipient of substance use disorder or mental health services; or 3) has Child Welfare or Child Protective Services involvement. FSPs are trained to provide trauma-informed and culturally responsive services and support. On Youth Mobile Crisis Response teams, they are trained in deescalation skills, and in helping families to identify triggers and coping skills in order to prevent future crises. They observe, interrupt, and shift dynamics, and provide education and skill introduction. FSPs are equipped with real-time data and are integral to reducing stigma as they provide intensive community education in mental health and crisis prevention and intervention strategies (e.g. Mental Health First Aid) – skills that are critical in rural areas where services are scarce.

In addition to effectively stretching Oklahoma's workforce, FSP connections with families, aided by telehealth technology, helped identify and guide state resources (beyond behavioral health care) to families in need throughout the COVID pandemic, particularly in rural and frontier communities.



## Additional Resources

- **SAMHSA**
  - [Family, Parent and Caregiver Peer Support in Behavioral Health](#)
  - [Rural Behavioral Health: Telehealth Challenges and Opportunities](#)
- **TAC** [Take a Walk on the Child Side: Making Emergency Behavioral Response Systems Work for Youth and Families](#)
- **American Psychological Association** [Telehealth is here to stay. Psychologists should equip themselves to offer it](#)
- **CDC** [Telehealth and Telemedicine](#)
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing** [Answering the Call: The Benefits of Teletherapy for Teens and Young Adults](#)
- **Oklahoma** [An Evaluation of the Grand Response Access Network on Demand Model \(GRAND Model\): Evidence of Effective Outcomes](#)

