

**Health Services Committee Testimony**

Wednesday November 4, 2015

Roughrider Room, State Capitol  
Bismarck, ND

Thomasine Heitkamp, Professor of Social Work/Associate Provost

Gwen Halaas, Acting Chair Family and Community Medicine and  
Senior Associate Dean Medicine and Health Sciences

Kathryn Rand, Dean School of Law

Thank you, Senator Lee, and the members of the Legislative Management's Interim Health Services Committee for inviting us to provide these comments. We care about the behavioral health of North Dakotans and look forward to contributing to the enhancement of behavioral health services in our state. We have been following recent media reports regarding problems with incarceration of persons with mental health disorders and the need for a more integrated system of behavioral health care. We wish to be responsive to: (1) the ongoing problems with rising drug use among the state's population, (2) the inadequacy or inaccessibility of mental health services in North Dakota—especially in rural areas, (3) the need for law and policy reforms, and (4) the need for more accessible health care to people experiencing behavioral health disorders.

The University of North Dakota is ideally suited to assist because we have talented faculty and students with the expertise and interest in addressing the behavioral health workforce needs in North Dakota and the commitment to serving citizens who are experiencing behavioral health needs.

A challenging and complex problem, such as mental health and addiction issues demands a multipronged and collaborative approach with enhanced services "on the ground." We have been working on a proposal that is designed to (1) improve access to behavioral health services (2) expand the behavioral health workforce, (3) train professionals and para-professionals to address behavioral health issues, (4) enhance access to conflict-free case management, and (5) provide access to data and analysis to conduct program evaluations and improve outcomes-based systems.

Dr. Gwen Halaas and Dean Kathryn Rand will describe our draft proposal for a **Behavioral Health and Addiction in North Dakota (BAND) program**, which is built around the concept of an interprofessional team housed in a central office in Bismarck. The interprofessional team will work collaboratively to develop recommendations for best practices and policy reform as well as to provide training for a team-based approach to address behavioral health issues more effectively and efficiently, including addressing the "gaps" in current services, such as for individuals in transition or with complex needs. This team-based approach can then be implemented in communities throughout North Dakota, incorporating student learning experiences in medicine, nursing, social work, law, counseling psychology, addiction counseling, public health and other relevant disciplines.

This Bismarck BAND office will:

- Expand the behavioral health and addiction counselor workforce through training and educational programs

- Provide training relevant to the legal dimensions of behavioral health, including commitment processes, first aid responders, the dynamics of co-occurring disorders, effective evidence-based practice and culturally responsive practice
- Provide training in a collaborative team-based approach to addressing the needs of individuals with behavioral and addiction problems, including those with complex needs, who are in transition, or who have limited resources
- Assist providers and policymakers through the development and dissemination of research, data, and best practices to inform evidence-based services as well as sound law and policy

To accomplish these goals, we need to assemble the following personnel in the BAND Bismarck office:

*Medical Director, (MD)* will work with the interprofessional team, supervise family medicine resident physicians in addressing prescription needs and managing chronic diseases, and oversee the education of medical students and residents in this team-based approach to addressing behavioral health needs.

*Mental Health Law and Policy Specialist, (JD)* will work with the interprofessional team, serve as a liaison with state courts, collaborate with Legal Services of North Dakota and other agencies and organizations providing legal services relevant to behavioral health, serve as a resource for policymakers and courts, and coordinate and supervise law students in field placements that are behavioral health related, including those that serve criminal defendants and prison populations.

*Social Worker, (MSW)* will work with the interprofessional team and supervise social work student interns who are conducting case management services to ensure access to housing and employment services, including supervision of students engaged in conflict-free case management.

The objectives of the BAND program are both academic and clinical: to train professionals, to educate students, to encourage the development of integrated and interprofessional behavioral health services, and to contribute to improving behavioral health of all North Dakotans. To accomplish these objectives, services and education must expand beyond Bismarck by incorporating student field experiences in additional interprofessional settings. Professionals and faculty in communities will receive training through the Bismarck office and supervise students who will be placed for internships and practicums in these settings. Financial supports will be needed for these students including travel reimbursement, housing and/or stipends. Technology to enable telehealth services or education will assure continuous educational and professional support.

The BAND program will include additional professionals who may be located in Grand Forks or in other communities throughout North Dakota. These include:

*Behavioral Health Trainer, MA* in a behavioral health field, to design and develop interactive and interdisciplinary training for a range of professionals, including social workers, nurses, mental health counselors, law enforcement, and healthcare providers.

*Addiction Counselor, Licensed Addiction Counselor*, to provide treatment and preventive services and to implement training and education for professionals and students.

*Research Specialist, PhD* in a behavioral health field, to evaluate the effectiveness of services and to assure best practices, and to gather, analyze and disseminate data.

*Part-time Licensed Counseling Psychologist and/or Psychologist*, to oversee a training unit of PhD students in clinical psychology and counseling psychology who will provide clinical treatment.

*Part-time Advanced Nurse Practitioner* to provide supervision to advanced practice nursing students.

*Part-time Masters Social Worker* to provide supervision to social work student interns.

*A Program Director*, with expertise in both the practice and academic world to oversee all aspects of the project, including working with the Department of Human Services and Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to coordinate services, ensure data is disseminated, prepare proposals for funding, assist in conducting training, coordinate with academic units, and supervise program staff.

Although this proposal is still in the planning stages, we are grateful for the opportunity to share with you our ideas about how the University of North Dakota, including both the School of Medicine and Health Sciences and the School of Law, as well as other colleges and departments, can help to improve behavioral health and addiction services in our state. If placements occur in the western part of North Dakota, graduates are more likely to accept employment there and will have the opportunity to return to their home communities.

We are happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.