

## Human Service Interim Committee Testimony

Jeff Herman, CEO, Prairie St. John's, Fargo ND, January 6, 2015

Madame Chairman and Members of the Human Service Committee,

Thank you for addressing the needs of our citizens and the crisis in our behavioral health system.

My name is Jeff Herman. I am the CEO at Prairie St. John's in Fargo, North Dakota. Prairie St. John's is a 110-inpatient bed facility providing mental health and chemical dependency services for children, adolescents and adults. We also offer a full psychiatric and addiction continuum of care beyond inpatient, including partial hospitalization, residential treatment, intensive outpatient services and clinic services. We serve person in the entire region with most patients coming from North Dakota, Minnesota and South Dakota. Attached find additional information.

My comments today are related to child and adolescent admissions to our inpatient hospital units as well as challenges we face in meeting the needs of individuals, families and communities.

To meet criteria for admission, children and adolescents are considered to be in a psychiatric crisis, suicidal or homicidal and in need of acute hospitalization for stabilization. In 2015, Prairie St. John's admitted 265 children and adolescents from North Dakota. 59 of these admissions were children ages 12 and under, 206 were adolescents ages 13-18 (39 who were dually diagnosed with mental illness and chemical dependency and 167 with a mental health diagnosis only). Average length of stay in the hospital for this population is 8 days.

While in the hospital, children and adolescents receive a psychiatric evaluation and psychiatrist visits which include medication management. They receive nursing care 24/7, group and individual therapy by mental health professionals, activity therapy groups, nutrition groups led by a registered

dietician, chemical dependency assessments if needed, and discharge planning services. Education is provided for two hours each day by Fargo Public School staff.

The level of severity of our adolescent patients' functioning and symptoms has been shown to be consistently above the national average over the past two years.

The greatest challenge Prairie St. John's is currently facing is the nursing staffing shortage which is causing units to remain closed. Children and adolescents are forced to seek placement elsewhere (often out of state), to spend hours waiting in an emergency room setting, or to not get the level of care needed. The impact to North Dakota and Minnesota has been our inability to accept over 750 patients during the past year. We cannot address behavioral health service gaps without addressing the workforce issue.

Three recommendations for your Committee to consider are:

1. **Establish a robust plan for financially supporting and training nursing staff by offering incentives to work in behavioral health in North Dakota.** The nursing shortage is a critical element in filling gaps in behavioral health in North Dakota. The addition of more psychiatric facilities and beds is not the solution to behavioral health access issues when critical workforce shortages exist. Beyond recruiting staff, there is a need to provide quality training to address the increased acuity that patients are presenting with. Creative solutions such as incentives to nurses who pursue training and a career in behavioral healthcare AND remain in North Dakota should be considered.
2. **Maximize federal dollars coming into North Dakota for Behavioral Health Services.** North Dakota has the opportunity to be a Medicaid Emergency Psychiatric Demonstration program state. If North Dakota were to apply and be approved, federal Medicaid dollars could be used to reimburse services for adults in what are called IMD (institutes for mental disease) facilities such as the state

hospital and private facilities like ours. This would enhance services for adults reducing emergency room use and free up state dollars for additional child and adolescent services.

- 3. Support education and training programs that address trauma-focused care and treatment across all disciplines and placement settings.** Right now children and adolescents are being placed out of state because the proper level of care is not available, often related to prior trauma. Trauma leads to reoccurring placements when not treated properly. Often continued acute care in a hospital is not the proper level of care or cannot be financially sustained. When working on discharge and we receive three denials from in state step down services from other providers, like residential care or foster care, children and adolescents are often placed out of state. This often comes with great negative impact to family continuity and involves considerable state and family financial expense.

Thank you for your attention. I am happy to address any questions you have now and to be available by phone or email at a later time. My contact information is on the attached materials.

Prairie St. John's is appreciative for the time and efforts of this committee and we look forward to opportunities in partnering to meet the Behavioral Health needs of the citizens of North Dakota. It is a matter of life and death to many.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Q: Why can't I handle this on my own?

A: Everyone needs help at times. You are not alone. There are skills that enable you to handle life's challenges. We know, from experience, there is no situation that is beyond hope.

### Q: Why me?

A: Often, patients wonder why they are experiencing certain emotions or why they even need treatment. Sometimes there is a specific cause or explanation. Many times there is not. In either case, you need an experienced partner. Prairie St. John's has the experience to get you back to life.

### Q: What kind of help do I need?

A: When you contact Prairie St. John's, we want to learn about you to identify your unique needs. We work with you to determine the best course of action. Our term for this process is "Needs Assessment". The goal is to make you aware of the treatment options available based on the results of this assessment.

### Q: How do I get help at Prairie St. John's?

A: It starts with a phone call to our Needs Assessment and Referral Center. We are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This central service is for all Prairie St. John's locations. A free and confidential assessment with a Needs Assessment Counselor helps identify your individual needs. We coordinate with specialists to find the right services for you. Needs Assessments can result in recommended services at Prairie St. John's or other community providers.

To learn more or to visit with a Needs Assessment Counselor, call us at:

Needs Assessment 701.476.7216  
Toll Free Needs Assessment 877.333.9565

## Our Continuum of Care

Prairie St. John's Continuum of Care is designed to make psychiatric and chemical dependency care available at all levels of need.

### Inpatient Hospitalization (all ages)

Mental Illness  
Chemical Dependency  
Dual Diagnosis

### Residential Treatment (adults only)

Chemical Dependency  
High & Low Intensity

### Partial Hospital Program (all ages)

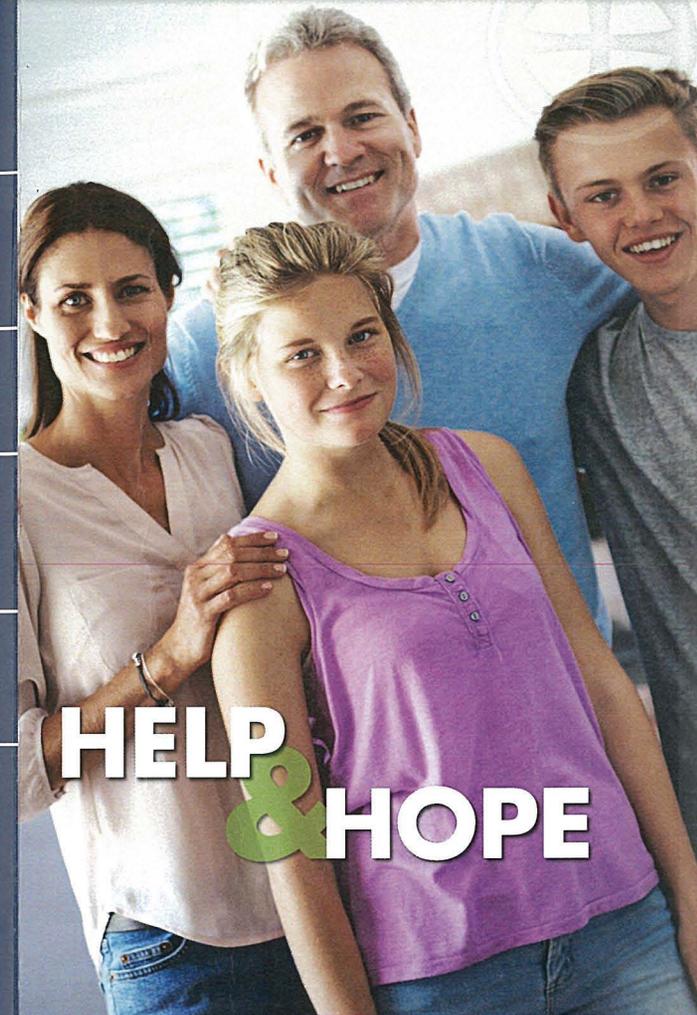
Mental Illness  
Chemical Dependency  
Dual Diagnosis

### Intensive Outpatient Program (adolescents and adults)

Chemical Dependency

### Clinic Services (all ages)

Fargo, ND  
Moorhead, MN



Mental Health and Substance Abuse  
Treatment For All Ages



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## Inpatient Programs

### Senior Care Unit

#### Geriatric Inpatient Hospitalization

Prairie St. John's Senior Care Unit offers a safe and secure environment to stabilize acute psychiatric and substance abuse concerns in an inpatient setting. Interventions are tailored to the emotional and behavioral needs unique to the older population. Inpatient treatment includes a comprehensive combination of assessments, therapies, family involvement, education, medication management, and activities. Treatment has an emphasis on cognitive function, emotional and behavioral regulation, sensory engagement, maximizing independence, and improving quality of life.

#### Adult Inpatient Hospitalization

Acute stabilization gets you through the crisis. We provide acute stabilization for both psychiatric and substance issues. Our psychiatric services address depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, and schizophrenia. For those in need of substance abuse treatment, our inpatient level of care provides individuals with necessary medication and medical supervision. Groups provide patients with an introduction to recovery and the opportunity to understand the joy of becoming healthy.

#### Child/Adolescent Inpatient Hospitalization

A highly supervised and structured environment stabilizes children and adolescents suffering from psychiatric and substance abuse issues. The program involves group, family and activity therapy.

## Outpatient Programs

### Adult Partial Hospitalization Program

This program provides a full day of therapeutic activities. Groups are designed to help patients identify and clarify problems as well as gain confidence when facing chemical dependency or mental health issues. Plans are developed for maintaining progress upon completion of the program. This program runs Monday through Friday.

### Child/Adolescent Partial Hospitalization Program

The child/adolescent program focuses on practical solutions for problems related to family, school and peers. Children and adolescents are taught skills to manage symptoms and triggers for mood, behavioral and substance abuse problems. This program runs Monday through Friday.

### Adult and Adolescent Intensive Outpatient Program

This program provides the opportunity for adolescents and adults to focus on chemical dependency treatment issues as the routine of daily life is resumed. This program runs in the evenings during the week.

### Clinic Services

Clinic Services include: psychiatric diagnostic assessment and treatment, psychological testing and treatment, medication evaluation and treatment, individual therapy, family therapy and counseling. Play therapy is also available for children.

## Residential Programs

### High Intensity Residential

High Intensity Residential Treatment for chemical dependency is similar to inpatient treatment for chemical dependency in that it is based on a 24-hour a day, 7-days a week treatment model. Treatment in High Intensity is very structured and incorporates a number of different professionals and therapeutic modalities. Detoxification occurs during a resident's inpatient stay. Once detoxed, High Intensity programming arms residents with strategies to maintain long-term sobriety.

### Low Intensity Residential

Low Intensity Residential Treatment, for chemical dependency, is designed for those who are able to operate in a less structured setting. Here they will receive treatment while pursuing clinical, vocational, educational and communal activities. The time in the residential program allows for extended protection from the toxic influence of substance exposure, problematic or substance-filled environments or the cultures of substance-involved or anti-social behaviors. This program is often provided in conjunction with the Partial Hospitalization Program.

## Welcome to Prairie St. John's

**At Prairie St. John's our mission is to offer Hope and Healing to those suffering from psychiatric conditions and addictions.**

We offer a full service psychiatric and addiction Continuum of Care. This includes services to children, adolescents and adults in the forms of Inpatient, Partial Hospital, Residential, Intensive Outpatient and Clinic Services. We are proud of our staff and the contributions they make to our healing mission.