

# CHR announces \$4M grant, new 'CT First' initiative

By Will Healey  
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Community Health Resources launched a new initiative Monday that will expand the behavioral health care services it offers to children, families, and adults, including targeted treatment for opioid addiction.

The initiative, called "CT First," is thanks to a \$4 million grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The funding, which CHR competed for nationally, is the largest grant the organization has received in its 52-year history.

According information from CHR, the funds will be used to help the organization become a Certified Community Behavioral Healthcare Clinic by the end of January.

The Certified Community Behavioral Healthcare Clinic program was born out of the federal Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Act, which established a federal definition and criteria for certified community behavioral health clinics, and stipulated that they may receive an enhanced

Medicaid reimbursement rate based on their anticipated costs of care.

The funding also will be used to expand 24/7 access to mobile crisis programs for children and adults by hiring overnight staff and continuing to work closely with local police departments. CHR recently secured a different federal grant in collaboration with the Suffield Police Department to train police officers to direct people experiencing emotional distress to treatment.

The \$4 million in funding also enables CHR to start doing primary care screenings at its Enfield office, at 153 Hazard Ave., and maintain its wellness programming in its Manchester and Bloomfield locations.

Additionally, money will be used to implement smoking cessation programming for clients, to expand "open-access" services for people with substance use disorders/opioid use disorders so they can access treatment services sooner, to increase the use of recovery coaches/peers to help facilitate rapid implementation of treatment, and to launch a more formal agreement with the U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs and veterans groups in the region.

CHR announced the funding and the CT First initiative at an event Monday at its Enfield location. U.S. Rep. Joseph D. Courtney, D-2nd District, was on hand for the announcement, and applauded the funding, the initiative, and the work of CHR.

Courtney said the organization's work is critically important, citing the recent announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the decline in life expectancy in the United States over the last few years is due largely to increases in suicide and drug overdose deaths.

"Increasing access to behavioral health care is crucial to reversing this tragic trend," Courtney said. "This grant funding and the CT First initiative are important investments in improving treatment capacity for veterans, those with substance use disorder, and others with behavioral health conditions in eastern and central Connecticut."

Heather M. Gates, president and CEO of CHR, said the funding would enable CHR to

advance some of its "highest priority goals."

"We are enormously grateful to have been selected in the national competition for this funding and deeply appreciate the support we have received

from Congressman Courtney and his staff," she said.

Gates also said CHR already has formed a consumer and family advisory committee for CT First and started interviewing for more than 20 new jobs.

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