

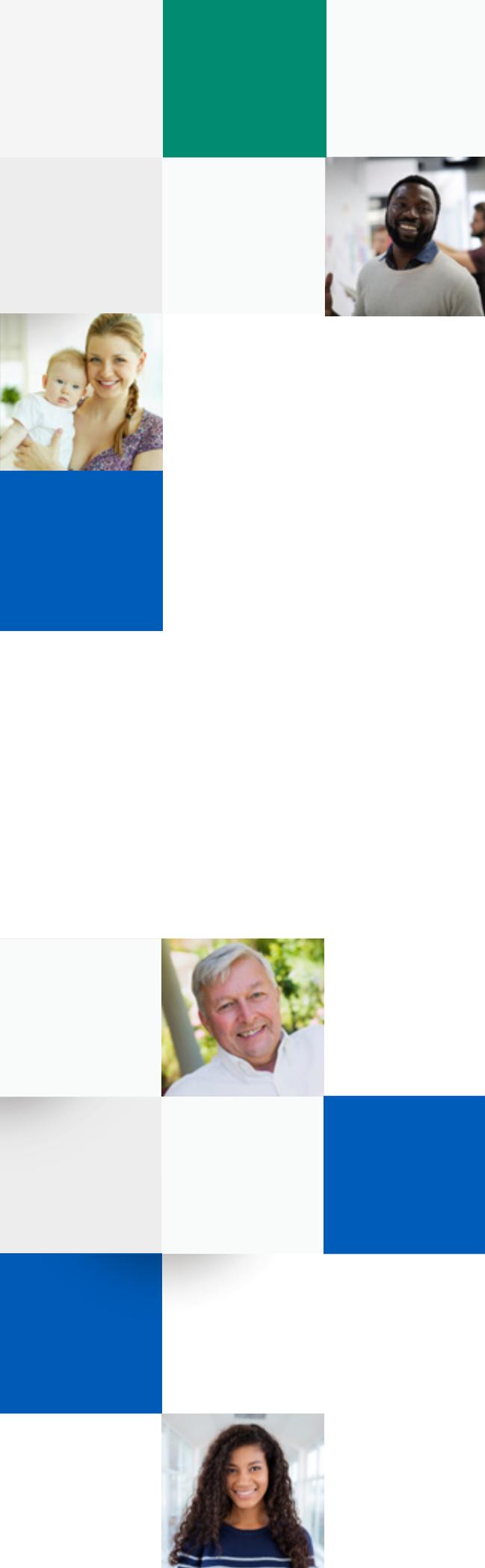
**PBHA**

Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance

**2019 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY**

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## Letter from the Chair

What an interesting year it has been for mental and behavioral health, not only in the Amarillo area, but throughout the State of Texas!

After three years of conversations, meetings and a great deal of work on the part of many individuals and groups, the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance (PBHA) is finally taking shape. What is that shape? That depends upon you and your willingness to stay the course and create the change we need in the Texas Panhandle. We are all busy trying to help those with mental health and addiction challenges, and there is so much work to be done.

You may wonder how can we possibly make a difference and change this landscape for the better. As I meet with people around the State of Texas and hear what is happening, it is very exciting to know that we are actually in the process of developing our system in the Panhandle, much like 34 other local systems throughout the state.

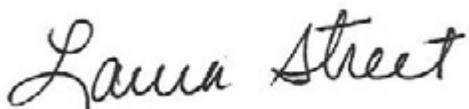
When I joined the Board of Directors of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute four years ago, it was overwhelming to think of the need and the lack of coordination of resources around the state. We set out to work on our own assessment with the Institute and developed our Charter and Strategic Plan – one of only five local systems in the state at that time. Now, thanks to the support of the Meadows Institute, Amarillo Area Foundation, Bivins Foundation, Harrington Cancer and Health Foundation, High Plains Christian Ministries Foundation and the United Way of Amarillo and Canyon, we have been able to work together toward achieving a common set of goals. We've found that we have some very effective programs and services in our area, and now we're working to find ways to bring that effectiveness across boundaries in our community.

The game changer is the acquisition of a grant from the Health and Human Services Commission distributing HB13 funds from the Texas Legislature – thanks to the work of Representative Four Price and the Select Committee on Mental Health, which he chairs. We were advised four years ago by the Meadows Institute and Representative Price to begin our own conversations regarding mental and behavioral health to have a chance to apply for funding to support the results of activity taking place statewide. Texas Panhandle Centers and the United Way of Amarillo and Canyon have been instrumental in support of our grant to develop an office for PBHA.

Our new executive director, Shree Veeramachaneni, began in October and has already created an astounding amount of momentum for our Strategic Plan. Her passion, education and experience will lead us forward with precision.

This work can only be done by you as a collection of individuals, agencies, organizations, groups and institutions representing our entire area of the Panhandle. We must work together to make the impact we need for the future of our health as a community. Let's help each other for intentional change in our community and our system. The outcome will help so many who are challenged with mental, behavioral and addiction challenges.

Looking forward to a groundbreaking 2019!



Laura Street, Chair



Laura Street

# PBHA Creates Transformative Impact for Local Systems

The exchange of ideas and information that the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance facilitates is already making a big difference in organizations within our area's mental health system.

**OPEN COMMUNICATION** Texas Panhandle Centers, a founding member of PBHA, is one organization that has found benefits from the open communication PBHA facilitates.

"PBHA has allowed TPC an opportunity to meet with existing stakeholders and at the same time to learn more about existing programs," said Bud Schertler, executive director for Texas Panhandle Centers. "This collective time has allowed the members opportunities to identify where there are gaps and/or redundancies in resources. Specifically, we have identified core community concerns in relation to mental health, substance use and physical health. TPC believes this platform will build productive health initiatives going forward."

**TRACKING SUCCESS** The opportunity to see how other organizations are tracking success has been particularly useful for the Amarillo Independent School District Student & Family Advocate program, which provides mental and behavioral health support to students and families, according to Jennifer Hale, QMHP, Lead Student & Family Advocate for the Amarillo High Cluster.



"In the 10 years we have been working in the district, we have collected data specifically on our students referred to the program," Hale said. "We did not, however, track or collect certain information that we see now would have been helpful. With the help of PBHA, we have made a plan to collect data that would help funders and that would better show the program's impact and effectiveness in our district."

This plan led the program to hire two WTAMU master's-level social work students to help collect data from the district's database, including attendance, discipline and possibly grades, Hale said.

"We will also make changes to the existing program to start tracking this information from now on in hopes to better the program for students and families in our district," Hale said.

**EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES** Beyond the positive changes that come from the exchange of information in PBHA meetings, PBHA has also been able to offer support to local organizations to enable them to get education outside of the area. In December, PBHA provided a letter of support for Amarillo's application to participate in a Sequential Intercept Mapping workshop offered by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation in Spring/Summer of 2019. The City of Amarillo was approved to receive the workshop, which will help the City create a set of priorities for a more cohesive, integrated service delivery approach by our local treatment and justice systems.

This workshop is especially important, as mental health costs in Potter and Randall counties were \$13.7 million in 2013, the most recent year in which costs were identified by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

# 2019 Promises Growth and Exciting Changes for PBHA

Over the next year, the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance expects to bring about a number of improvements to the area's mental health care system, including a more robust resource directory, rural mental health systems enhancements and events for community members and health providers.

- One of the most exciting initiatives for the year is the creation of an easy-to-use **resource directory** so providers and others in the community can find resources to help with all mental health needs. The directory will reside on a website that provides the community with a powerful and flexible way to promote the health services in their communities.
- With PBHA's state grant, we will strive to enhance the systems of care in the rural regions of the Panhandle. PBHA is working with Dallam County as its first pilot program to help address issues such as access to care. The results of this work will guide efforts to **improve mental health care systems in other rural counties** of the Texas Panhandle and possibly beyond.
- On May 21, 2019, PBHA will host a **community awareness event** in Amarillo. The event will include a keynote speaker, a local providers panel, a resource fair and an art exhibit by local artists with lived experiences of behavioral health conditions. The goal for the event is to increase awareness in the community that behavioral health conditions (including mental illness, substance use and other addictions) are treatable and it requires a community effort to lower the stigma around mental illness and improve access to care.
- PBHA will gather feedback from local healthcare professionals about challenges in treating patients with behavioral health needs. Feedback will then be used to design and deliver an educational curriculum that will allow local providers to better address behavioral health. Providers will be able to make stronger and more effective referrals to resources in the community. This will foster an **integrated healthcare approach** between physical and behavioral health, mental health and substance use.

## *Issues PBHA is addressing:*

- Reduce the stigma around mental health.
- Improve early-intervention programs to prioritize prevention over crisis response.
- Better integrate health care professionals across primary and mental health providers so patients can receive holistic care.
- Recruit and retain more mental health practitioners.
- Provide training to primary care providers and make better use of technology in order to increase access to mental health care.

# Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute Sets Up PBHA for Success

Over the last four years, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) has provided advice and support in many ways, including hosting a day-long summit to help the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance get organized and demonstrate the need for the Alliance.

The MMHPI works to leverage resources throughout the state at a grassroots level, sharing best practices, building protocols and making resources available so local systems like PBHA can make transformative changes to mental health care in their areas. The goal of the MMHPI is for Texas to become the national leader in treating people with mental health needs, and the local systems that MMHPI has helped to establish are key to making that goal possible.

The MMHPI has been integral in helping PBHA form and grow. Their consultants helped PBHA create a strategy for improving area systems, develop a strategic plan and apply for grant funding, while providing guidance to help PBHA grow sustainably.

In addition to helping form grassroot networks for improving local mental health care, the MMHPI has created a public awareness campaign called Okay to Say™, which encourages people to talk openly about mental illness in order to change perceptions and reduce stigma. Okay to Say was created because of a statewide survey that found that three out of four Texans have a friend or family member who has experienced a mental health issue, and nine out of 10 Texans think it's harder to talk about mental illness than physical illness. By encouraging people to discuss mental health publicly, the MMHPI expects to reduce the stigma around these issues, which would then make it easier for people to seek treatment.



## HB13 Grant Allows PBHA To Grow

The Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance is being awarded a \$208,915 grant from the House Bill 13 Community Mental Health Grant Program. This funding has accelerated PBHA's growth and ability to make an impact on mental health systems in the area.

The Community Mental Health Grant Program supports community collaboration, aiming to reduce duplication of mental health services and strengthen continuity of care. Grants are allocated so communities can provide high-quality services and treatment to people with mental illness and unmet behavioral health needs.

One of the expectations of the grant is to help programs within the area combine resources for more effectiveness and efficiency, eliminating gaps in services and reducing overlapping services. This was a perfect match for the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance's goal of helping behavioral health services work together to provide better access to care throughout the Panhandle.

Representative Four Price, who represents Texas House of Representatives District 87, which includes Carson, Hutchinson, Moore, Potter and Sherman counties, served as chair of the Select Committee on Mental Health. His efforts in improving mental health care across the state have made a tremendous difference, and he was instrumental in passing House Bill 13. PBHA and other mental health improvement efforts are expanding as a direct result of Representative Price's leadership.

# Mental Health First Aid Classes Available To Train for Crisis Response

Mental Health First Aid classes teach people how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders, providing the skills needed to give initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem.

Across the United States, more than one million people have been trained in Mental Health First Aid, and Texas alone has more than 30,000 people trained.

The Panhandle has nine instructors for Mental Health First Aid classes, and more than 700 Panhandle residents have attended classes since 2017. The Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance is in the process of getting every member certified in Mental Health First Aid, and so far, 24 members have completed a course.

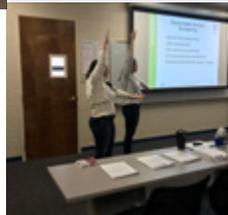
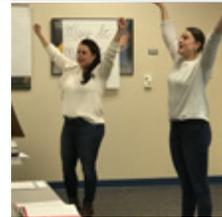
Shortly after taking a Mental Health First Aid training course, Rebecca Waggoner had an opportunity to use her training when one of her employees approached her, “agitated and very unhappy about a recurrence with his customers,” Waggoner said. The MHFA class gave her the confidence to ask “are you okay?”

“From that initial discussion, I was able to see that he wasn’t experiencing an episode and merely needed me to listen nonjudgmentally,” Waggoner said. “Being there to talk helped make a difference in his situation, and he left the conversation feeling better and smiling.”

The incident reinforced her belief that the training can help prevent mental illness crises from occurring in the future.

“It took only a few minutes of my time to offer support,” Waggoner said.

There is a shortage of available MHFA instructors. Currently, classes are being offered by PBHA, Amarillo College, Texas AgriLife and Texas Panhandle Centers. PBHA and its partners are working toward improving the availability of MHFA classes in the community. Please email PBHA, Texas AgriLife or Amarillo College Continuing Ed regarding class availability.



*Those interested in an MHFA class should email:*

Shree Veeramachaneni at PBHA  
[shree@panhandlebehavioralhealthalliance.org](mailto:shree@panhandlebehavioralhealthalliance.org)

Miquela Smith at Texas AgriLife  
[miquela.smith@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:miquela.smith@ag.tamu.edu)

or Jeff Wallick at Amarillo College  
[j0079278@actx.edu](mailto:j0079278@actx.edu)

# PBHA Hires Executive Director To Facilitate Mission



*Shree Veeramachaneni*

Shree Veeramachaneni joined PBHA as the executive director in October 2018.

In this role, Shree is responsible for operational budgeting and financial management, developing educational opportunities and growing the organization to better accomplish PBHA goals.

The opportunity to help the community rally around mental and behavioral health attracted her to the role, Shree said.

“This role allows PBHA members to help the community change in a sustainable manner with a long-lasting impact,” Shree said.

“Creating a sustainable impact requires a strong foundation, and PBHA members have worked hard to create a strategic plan based on local data and have begun the methodical work of implementing that plan.”

Shree brings a wealth of organizational and leadership experience to PBHA. Before joining PBHA, she worked on two Panhandle-wide initiatives, the Disability Navigator Initiative with the Texas Workforce Commission and the Panhandle Prosperity Initiative with the Amarillo Area Foundation. Beyond those two roles, Shree has had experience with fundraising and presenting to diverse audiences, rounding out important skills for PBHA.

In the few months she’s worked with PBHA, Shree has already made big strides for the organization, including expanding PBHA’s community collaborations and increasing awareness of the local data surrounding mental health through a presentation to the area’s healthcare influencers.

“We’re collaborating with Texas Panhandle Centers, Amarillo College and Texas AgriLife to promote and provide Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) classes to the community,” Shree said.

The coming year promises to be an exciting time for expanding access to mental health care in the Panhandle, Shree said.

“We have multiple ideas in the works that are going to start bearing fruit in 2019,” Shree said. “We look forward to completing our workgroup formations and engaging with other counties in the Texas Panhandle to improve the behavioral health life cycle.”

# Thank You Funders and Stakeholders

## *Funders:*

Amarillo Area Foundation  
Baptist Community Services  
Harrington Cancer and Health Foundation  
Mary E. Bivins Foundation

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute  
United Supermarkets  
United Way Amarillo/Canyon

## *Stakeholders:*

Amarillo Area Mental Health Consumers (Agape Center)  
Amarillo College  
Amarillo Family Institute  
Amarillo Independent School District  
Amarillo Police Department  
Amarillo Public Health Department  
AscentHealth Consulting  
The Carlisle Collective  
Cenikor Foundation  
Central Plains Local Mental Health Authority  
City of Amarillo  
Coalition of Health Services  
Community Supervision and Corrections  
Department for the 47th Judicial District  
Dave Clark Consulting  
Kathy Cornett, Community Volunteer  
Judy Day, Community Volunteer  
Downtown Women's Center  
Family Support Services  
Adrian Gonzalez, Community Volunteer  
Heal the City  
Linda Hilario, Community Volunteer  
J.O. Wyatt Clinic

Laura Street Consulting  
Living Intentionally Ministries  
Mayes Therapy  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – Texas Panhandle  
Panhandle Community Services  
Panhandle Regional Planning Commission  
Potter County District Attorney's Office  
Potter County Judge Nancy Tanner  
Celeste Ramirez, Community Volunteer  
Randall County Sheriff's Office  
Regence Health Network  
Superior Health Plan  
Texas AgriLife Extension  
Texas Panhandle Centers  
Texas Panhandle Suicide Prevention Coalition  
Texas Panhandle War Memorial  
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center:  
Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry  
Veterans Administration Psychiatry  
Rebecca Waggoner, Community Volunteer  
Kelli Watson, Community Volunteer  
West Texas A&M University

# MENTAL HEALTH IN OUR COMMUNITY

Reports of seeking mental health care have increased more than

**40%**

from 2013 to 2018 (12% to 17%)

**29%**

of respondents who sought mental health care in the last two years cited an issue with access to care, including concerns about cost, wait time, not knowing where to go and being unable to get an appointment

**83%**

of respondents said they or a member of their household sought mental health care in the last two years

**14%**

of residents between the ages of 18-34 have used an illicit drug in the last 12 months

*Source: City of Amarillo Community Health Needs Assessment*



## VISION

The Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance envisions a Texas Panhandle which promotes behavioral health and wellness where all people have access to high-quality behavioral health care when and where they need it.

## MISSION

The Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance will build systems that improve the life cycle of behavioral health care for all people of the Texas Panhandle.

## VALUES

- Behavioral health is a critical part of our community's well-being.
- Behavioral health is an integral part of our community's healthcare.
- Behavioral health services are welcoming, honoring and accessible.
- Practitioners provide compassionate, competent and high quality services.
- Healing and recovery provide hope for all.
- A collective effort to improve the life-cycle of behavioral health care will create a streamlined, efficient system that will benefit our entire community.
- Our life-cycle of care includes reducing stigma and engaging partners by educating and informing the public about behavioral health.
- The role of the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance includes advocacy for policies and practices that support behavioral health care.

## *What are the barriers to getting mental health care?*

- Stigma is a serious obstacle to treatment.
- Siloed care is a barrier to treatment and reinforces stigma.
- Current shortage of practitioners and appropriate facilities is a significant problem.
- Current insurance coverage of mental health care is inadequate.
- The system prioritizes acute care over preventative services.

Source: The Frameworks Institute *Beyond Awareness of Stigma: Moving Public Understanding to the Next Level*

# PBHA

Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance

### *Find us online!*

PanhandleBehavioralHealthAlliance.org  
facebook.com/TXPBHA

### *How to Donate*

Make tax deductible donations payable to:

United Way of Amarillo and Canyon

*Memo line: For Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance (PBHA)*