An Essex County Community Foundation Think Lab

IMAGINING A BETTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM

September 22, 2021 | Summary Report
Introduction

HOW WE GOT HERE

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, ECCF has convened nearly 400 local leaders to discuss the unprecedented challenges facing our communities, and together, explore collaborative solutions to strengthen our most critical social sectors.

Through these interactive convenings behavioral health quickly emerged as a sector that could benefit from collaborative design thinking. Prior to the pandemic, the sector was experiencing a steady increase in demand and this has only been exacerbated as a result of the ongoing crisis.

BEFORE COVID-19

Essex County residents experienced...

- Poorer overall mental and physical health
- More difficulty accessing care
- More binge drinking
- Higher rates of overdose

compared to Middlesex, Suffolk and Worcester counties.

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

WHAT IS A THINK LAB?

Essex County Think Labs are interactive community convenings that lead participants through a design-thinking activity to identify strengths and challenges, brainstorm collaborative solutions and prioritize actions around a specific topic area.

Think Lab Goals:

- Establish the place and space for leaders to explore and imagine solutions to support the behavioral health system in Essex County.
- Build civic and human infrastructure to forge relationships, strengthen partnerships and collaboratively address challenges and issues.
On Wednesday, September 22, 2021, ECCF welcomed more than 120 cross-sector leaders from Essex County to the Imagining a Better Behavioral Health System Think Lab.

Participants were intentionally selected and invited to attend based on their knowledge and experience in the sector.

A broad range of organizations representing multiple sectors attended:

- Action, Inc.
- Andover Public Schools
- Behavioral Health Consultant
- Beth Israel Lahey Health Behavioral Services
- Beverly & Addison Gilbert Hospitals
- Beverly Council on Aging & Senior Community Center
- Beverly Public Schools
- Beverly Centerville Elementary School
- Bridgewell
- Care Dimensions
- Centerboard
- Children’s Friend and Family Services
- Citizens Inn
- City of Gloucester
- Curtis Strategy
- Danvers Public Schools
- DHK Investments
- Elder Services of Merrimack Valley/NS
- Essex County Community Foundation
- Essex County Juvenile Court Clinic
- Evelyn Lilly Lutz Foundation
- FLC
- Full Frame Communications
- Garden City Pediatric Associates
- Gloucester Health Department
- GLSS
- GraVoc
- Greater Lawrence Community Action Council
- Greater Lynn Senior Services
- Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation
- Healing Abuse Working for Change
- Independent consultant
- Institute for Health and Recovery
- JF&CS
- Johnson O’Connor Feron & Carucci
- K2 Consulting
- Learn To Cope
- LVCC, INC.
- Lynn Community Health Center
- Manchester Board of Health
- Marblehead Counseling Center
- Mass Cultural Council
- MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board
- MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board
- MassHire North Shore Workforce Board
- MBHP/Beacon Health Options
- McLean Hospital
- Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids (MHAP for Kids)
- Methuen PS / MASMHC
- Metro North YMCA
- MetroWest Health Foundation
- MSPCC
- NextGen Committee
- North Shore community Health Center
- North Shore Community Health Network
- Northeast Legal Aid
- Office of Congressman Seth Moulton
- Office of Senator Brendan Crighton
- Plummer Youth Promise
- Police Assisted Addiction & Recovery Initiative (PAARI)
- Private practice, LICSW
- Project Adventure
- Office of Rep. Andy Vargas
- Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation
- Rise Above Foundation
- Rockport Public Schools
- Ropes & Gray LLP
- Salem Hospital
- Stephanie Jordan Brown, LLC
- The Greater Lawrence Family Health Center
- The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts
- The Klarman Family Foundation
- The NAN Project
- The Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- The Professional Center for Child Development
- Town of Lynnfield / A Healthy Lynnfield
- Trefler Foundation
- UniCare
- Volunteers of America of Massachusetts
- ZurickDavis

Learn more about ECCF’s Think Labs at eccf.org/insights.
GUEST SPEAKER

The Think Lab session began with a presentation from Stephanie Jordan Brown, former acting Chief of Behavioral Health and Director of the Office of Behavioral Health for Massachusetts Medicaid (Masshealth).

With extensive experience in the MA health sector, Stephanie shared key data points for Essex County and other foundational information from the Massachusetts Roadmap for Behavioral Health Reform to frame the upcoming conversation about local challenges and opportunities.

THE FOUNDATIONAL DATA

Next, Think Lab participants reviewed data aggregated from the feedback of hundreds of community leaders previously convened around addressing our region’s greatest challenges in a post-pandemic world.

The following PEOPLE, PRINCIPLES and OBSERVATIONS acted as foundational information to spark further conversation and idea generation about the topic of behavioral health.

**PEOPLE, ROLES & ORGANIZATIONS**

Who should be involved in this work?

- Clients and Consumers
- Clinicians and Practitioners
- Community Leaders
- Education Sector
- Emergency Responders
- Faith Based Leaders
- For-Profit Providers
- Funders/Philanthropists
- Government/Municipalities
- Healthcare Sector
- Insurance Providers
- Justice System
- Nonprofits
- Residents
- School-based Behavioral Health Staff
- Small and Large Businesses
- Treatment Providers
- Youth Services

**PRINCIPLES**

What values and mindsets will guide this journey?

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<th>Values to guide us:</th>
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OBSERVATIONS
What is happening currently happening in the behavioral health field?

There are many bright spots within the system.
• Many organizations are collaborating to provide new solutions and resources.
• National visibility and awareness campaigns are helping to reduce stigma.
• Schools are adapting to meet student needs.

Access to services is a challenge.
• There is more need than there are providers.
• The digital divide has prevented vulnerable communities from taking advantage of telehealth.
• Lack of insurance or insurance burdens prevent individuals from seeking help.

Demand has increased significantly during COVID-19.
• New demand is exacerbating the challenges of already stressed systems.
• Substance use and suicide rates have increased over the pandemic.
• Economic effects of COVID-19 have resulted in needs escalating.
• Children and teens are experiencing more challenges than ever before; 50% of children admitted to Beverly Hospital require behavioral health care.

More behavioral health education is needed.
• Seeking support for behavioral health carries a social stigma.
• Prevention education is under-funded.
• Resources are not always easy to find or understand.

It will take inclusive and innovative thinking to address the challenges.
• Individuals accessing the system should have a seat at the table to help design it.
• Community-based organizations should be considered for service delivery as they serve and are trusted by large populations.
• Need to explore how we expand services while also supporting the service professionals.

Critical workforce issues exist.
• We need to expand the workforce, however funding for services is a major challenge.
• There are currently not enough people interested in behavioral health careers.
• Staff are experiencing burnout both at work and at home.
IDENTIFYING BIG IDEAS

Reflecting on the baseline data, each group was asked to use their expertise in the behavioral health sector to brainstorm BIG IDEAS that would strengthen the regional system.

This exercise was meant to inspire creative thinking, foster the spirit of working collaboratively and build relationships that help produce systems-based solutions.

More than 150 big ideas were shared and documented across 11 small groups. From the data, 8 major themes emerged:

**ACCESS**
Meet people where they are
- Bring care to individuals directly by integrating services at community nonprofits/schools/health providers/faith-based and mobile locations
- Prioritize school-based services and solutions to better support youth
- Pilot an integrated housing development with healthcare, workforce and childcare solutions
- Invest in individual accessibility solutions like transportation and digital equity

**WORKFORCE**
Increase the pipeline and supports for professionals
- Create a regional coalition to address workforce development, worker shortages and advocate for better wages
- Collaborate with more schools to increase the professional pipeline and provide more training spaces
- Support new professionals with continuing, multi-disciplinary education in a variety of settings
- Prioritize new pathways for multi-lingual workers at all levels so that clinicians are more representative of the populations they serve

**EARLY DIAGNOSIS**
Focus on early detection and intervention
- Create a universal screening tool and care pathways for early detection and intervention
- Mandate BH screenings within early education centers and schools
- Engage families with intergenerational approaches to BH detection and intervention
- Identify/create a variety of support groups relevant to different populations (youth, seniors, families, grieving family, survivors parents)

*Indicates the frequency of the idea
**EDUCATION**

Prioritize prevention education

- Train educators to deliver services in the classroom via cognitive behavioral techniques and social emotional learning****
- Provide critical trainings like suicide prevention and ACES (Adverse Childhood Experience Study) to everyone in the education or social sectors***
- Provide basic age-appropriate behavioral health curriculum for students and families*****
- Create campaigns to change the way people think and talk about behavioral health from an early age to reduce the stigma****
- Help parents address intergenerational trauma before it is passed down to future generations*

**INFORMATION | RESOURCES**

Centralize resources and data

- Share population data across systems for better understanding of Essex County residents***
- Remove silos with a shared client intake platform allowing providers to deliver more informed and efficient support***
- Create an asset map of behavioral health resources and providers*
- Invest in a regional navigator to create a structure to develop community partnerships for multi-disciplinary, strategic outreach that increases access to services**

**CLINICAL INNOVATION**

Invest in and pilot new practices and solutions

- Invest in and expand telehealth and other virtual modalities*****
- Integrate providers so that behavioral health is considered primary care***
- Strategize how to use evidence-based practices more commonly**
- Focus on holistic, wraparound approaches to care focusing on needs not services*

**EXPAND FUNDERS**

Reimagine funding for the sector

- Focus on building sustainable funding sources for long-term solutions***
- Create a centralized resource and funding opportunity hub for the sector*
- Offer regular, data-focused learning opportunities so funders can better understand the challenges
- Target philanthropy efforts to those who can underwrite care in their own community

**PAYOR REFORM**

Advocate for changes

- Get insurers to prioritize “whole” care by reimbursing more for primary care that is inclusive of behavioral health*****
- Form a multi-sector collaborative to advocate for reimbursement reform***
- Convene payors to understand the obstacles to providing better reimbursement and help to create solutions***
- Incentivize more private providers/services to take insurance**
BUILDING A PROTOTYPE: THE BEST BIG IDEAS

After generating as many ideas as possible, groups were asked to rank each and choose the most compelling to develop a prototype solution and “pitch” it to the larger group. This exercise gave each team the opportunity to deepen their collaboration, define tangible next steps, have fun and be inspired by what could be.

A sampling of just four of the eleven prototypes documented is below:

**COMMUNITY NETWORKS FOR MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT**
Bridging, bonding, building and belonging!

**HEADLINES:**
- Multi-lingual, culturally competent behavioral health model scales access by using community spaces to deliver services.
- Local group uses everyday places in creative ways to help improve mental health.
- Essex County delivers the most rapid expansion in access to behavioral health support in decades.

**HOW THIS WILL HELP:**
- Increase access with a local solution
- Reduce stigma of clinical setting
- Help to identify individuals at higher risk early

**PARTNERS TO INVOLVE:**
- Schools
- Youth programs
- Housing organizations
- Nonprofits
- Providers
- Community leaders

**KEY FIRST STEPS:**
- Define and create a network of care
- Identify priorities and metrics of success
- Train clinical staff for pilot

**HEALTHY HOUSING**
Housing that nourishes!

**HEADLINES:**
- Join an inclusive community that values and supports your behavioral health!
- Overwhelming demand proves the need for Healthy Housing.
- New housing concept levels the playing field between behavioral and physical health.

**HOW THIS WILL HELP:**
- Increases access to the local community
- Increases affordable housing for behavioral health workforce and individuals
- Integrates housing and healthcare

**PARTNERS TO INVOLVE:**
- Real estate developers
- Large employers
- Hospitals
- Payors
- Venture partners
- Community organizations

**KEY FIRST STEPS:**
- Identify and convene partners
- Assess community needs and wants
- Engage municipalities in the planning
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ECOSYSTEM IN SCHOOLS**
Meeting kids where they are at!

**HEADLINES:**
- All kids now have access to behavioral health services in schools.
- Schools tear down behavioral health barriers and stigma by integrating services.
- Schools and behavioral health professionals work together to meet kids where they are.

**HOW THIS WILL HELP:**
- Enables teachers to liaise with clinicians about student needs
- Gives students access where they are
- Addresses digital divide by allowing students to access technology at school for services

**PARTNERS TO INVOLVE:**
- Students
- Educators, administration, counselors, coaches
- Clinicians and doctors
- Parents and families
- Payors

**KEY FIRST STEPS:**
- Form an ecosystem with all partners
- Make connections and build trust
- Identify what other partners are needed

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**SKILL UP, SCALE UP**
Expanding behavioral health services while addressing workforce shortages

**HEADLINES:**
- Large-scale collaboration results in mental health gains for students!
- Continuum of services identifies students in early grades and carries students forward as needed.
- New healthcare workforce pipeline increases access to quality care!

**HOW THIS WILL HELP:**
- Addresses workforce challenges
- Provides a continuum of care for students
- Focuses on prevention and early intervention

**PARTNERS TO INVOLVE:**
- Schools / Tech Schools
- Providers
- Training sites
- 2-4 year Colleges

**KEY FIRST STEPS:**
- Secure investment in staff
- Form cross-sector coalition
- Establish goals and short-term deliverables

*All ideas, themes and prototypes generated from this session have been documented and will inform ECCF’s future work in this area.*
Looking Forward

ECCF Collaborative Grants

ECCF, along with additional funders passionate about innovative solutions in behavioral health, are joining forces and financial resources to co-fund partnership grants. Organizations working together on ideas that can address the barriers to a stronger behavioral health system will be encouraged to apply.

Our collaborative grant program will launch in early November 2021. Virtual Q&A sessions will be scheduled soon and more information can be found at eccf.org.

Launching!
Early November 2021

Questions?
Carol Lavoie Schuster
Vice President for Grants, Nonprofit and Donor Services

Special Thanks to Our Presenter

Stephanie Jordan Brown
Behavioral Health Reform Consultant, Former Medicaid Director and Managed Care Executive

Voices from the Think Lab

So glad to be here.
Thanks for including me in this process.

Wow.
Loved being a part of this process. Hope we do more of these!

Lots of great discussion in our group!

So much great group thinking!

Thank you all on this call for the work that you do and ECCF for bringing us together and taking the next steps!
NEXT STEPS

October, 2021
Publish summary report and share with Think Lab participants and legislative partners.

October, 2021
Share and discuss with ECCF Trustees, County Leadership Council, staff and volunteers for further analysis.

Early November, 2021
Launch collaborative grant program to invest in and encourage systems change.

Stay tuned!
Explore future behavioral health system convenings and additional Think Labs in intersecting areas.

Really like this thinking process. Thanks to all.
Great think lab, as always! Great to see so many other partners here, too.
Group 11 rocks! Thanks so much for a great conversation!
AGREE!!!...great meeting! Looking forward to next steps!
So many groups and so many ideas - I love seeing the common themes!
Great leadership and ideas! Thank you!
Essex County Community Foundation inspires philanthropy that strengthens the communities of Essex County by managing charitable assets, strengthening and supporting nonprofits, and engaging in strategic community leadership initiatives.

LEARN MORE AND JOIN US IN THIS WORK.

Essex County Community Foundation
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