



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF CANTON

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League of Women Voters of Canton Mental Health Study Executive Summary

Released December 2013

Background: Prompted by concerns about resources for mental health care voiced at an earlier LWV of Canton-sponsored forum, the LWV of Canton voted in the fall of 2012 to conduct a study of mental health services for residents of the Farmington Valley. The study committee gathered data from numerous sources including federal and state agencies and advocacy groups such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Additionally, five questions designed to assess the availability of services and supports for Farmington Valley residents with behavioral health issues and for their families were used to interview parents, consumer advocates and professionals including social service directors, police and school officials, school support staff and clergy in the towns of Avon, Canton, Farmington, Granby and Simsbury. The questions covered the following areas:

1. What kinds of behavioral health services are currently available to residents of your town and the Farmington Valley?
2. Are services accessible?
3. What can be done to improve services?

By May 2013, the interviews were complete and the responses enabled the League Mental Health Study Committee to identify a number of common concerns around available mental/behavioral health services. These are listed below and were not prioritized by the Study Committee.

1. Stigma exists for consumers and families.
2. Mental health parity is an issue. Mental health issues have not been treated like other illnesses.
3. Early detection/intervention is inadequate.
4. Lack of insurance coverage and inadequate coverage (Impact of the Affordable Care Act in 2014) is a problem.
5. There are too few professionals to diagnose and treat in the Farmington Valley.
6. Access to information and services is sometimes confusing and inadequate.
7. Housing and long-term solutions are lacking.
8. Transportation is a problem because many services are outside of towns.

Based on the above concerns and with consideration of the official positions of the Connecticut League of Women Voters and the League of Women Voters of the United

States, the Canton LWV Mental Health Study Committee decided to focus on three questions:

1. What behavioral health services are available to residents of the Farmington Valley?
2. What stands in the way of individuals receiving the services they need for behavioral health difficulties?
3. What can state and local governments and other entities do to improve the state of behavioral health for residents of Canton and the Farmington Valley?

Available Mental/Behavioral Health Services for Farmington Valley Residents:

There are many behavioral health services available to children and adults who are residents of the Farmington Valley. These include services from towns, schools, private practitioners and nonprofit agencies. Services also include the “safety net” services funded by the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Also, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides some services, including education and family support. However, most services available to FV residents are located outside of the Farmington Valley and require transportation.

Emergency psychiatric services are available for both adults and children *in* the Farmington Valley. The Capital Region Mental Health Center Mobile Crisis Team serves adults in Avon, Farmington, Canton and Simsbury. Children in crisis are served by Wheeler Clinic’s DCF-funded Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services in all four towns. These services are provided on location in the local towns. In Granby, crisis service is provided by Community Health Resources both to adults and children, also in the town itself rather than in Hartford or other locations. Additional information is available in the full report.

Obstacles to Obtaining Mental/Behavioral Health Care: There are numerous obstacles that stand in the way of an individual’s receiving appropriate crisis or long-term care. These may include the stigma associated with mental/behavioral health related illnesses, lack of emergency responders trained as part of a Crisis Intervention Team able to help in psychiatric emergencies, public ignorance about mental/behavioral health problems and how to handle them, lack of transportation to care, lack of local care providers, and lack of supportive housing and other supports such as readily available case managers. Towns vary in the services they offer. A fuller discussion is provided in the complete report.

Action Possibilities for Towns and the State: Action possibilities for the State of Connecticut include facilitating access to care, providing more supported housing both as group homes and individual housing, providing better transportation and/or making more services locally, educating the public about mental health and behavioral health including reducing stigma and providing clear, concise information for state residents on where to turn for help with mental and behavioral health issues.

Towns can also take action in the same areas, working to influence state government to make improvements in the services it offers. They can also play a role through the

schools in budgeting for more school special services staff, including efforts to reduce stigma in the school curriculum and in educating teachers and other school staff, parents and students about mental and behavioral health issues. Additionally towns could provide appropriate training for the first responders, local clergy and youth leaders. Towns could also work with local businesses to encourage their hiring people with mental health and behavioral illness problems in appropriate jobs.

**League of Women Voters of Canton
Position Statement on Mental Health Services
for Residents of the Farmington Valley**

Adopted Nov. 6, 2013

The LWV US believes that every U.S. resident should have access to a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost that includes mental health care.

The LWV of Canton has found that residents, town officials and providers in the Farmington Valley believe that quality, affordable mental health care is not as accessible to residents of the Farmington Valley as it should be.

The LWV of Canton favors actions by local, state and federal governments to remove barriers and enhance access to mental health care for residents of the Farmington Valley including, but not limited to the following measures:

- Providing more and better information about mental health and services;
- Expanding prevention and early intervention services in the Farmington Valley;
- Removal of barriers to services such as transportation, lack of or complexity of insurance, lack of housing, shortage of mental health professionals, stigma;
- Expanding services and addressing gaps in the service system such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for all police in the Farmington Valley towns;
- Establishment of more mental health services *in* the Farmington Valley towns by Capitol Region Mental Health Center and other public and private providers.