

Americares U.S. Program's Mental Health Initiative: A Resource for the Uninsured and Underinsured with Mental Illness

Background

Mental illness and substance use disorder are significant public health issues in the United States and specifically among the low-income and underserved. Nationally, 42.5 million adults experienced a mental illness in the past year. People with mental illness are more likely to be poor and uninsured as compared to the general population. Further, 8.1 million adults have a mental illness and are uninsured. Those who lack insurance have difficulty accessing treatment and needed medications and are thus at an increased risk of hospitalization, poor health outcomes and diminished quality of life.

Community mental/ behavioral health centers (CMHCs/ CBHCs) are the public mental health system for people covered by Medicaid and Medicare as well as the uninsured, serving more than 8 million people with mental illness. CMHCs/CBHCs are largely publicly-funded nonprofits that provide medication management and counseling; some also provide primary care services to help meet the full range of their patients' health care needs.

Currently, CMHCs/ CBHCs receive little to no support from humanitarian aid organizations and rely primarily on pharmaceutical patient assistance programs (PAPs) and low-cost generics for uninsured patients whose conditions require medication. While these options help, they are not a total solution – some patients do not qualify for PAPs or are unable to complete the extensive paperwork required to enroll and others are unable to afford even generic medications. Adherence to medication therapy, and thus symptom-reduction and enhanced functioning, increase when people with mental illness are able to leave a psychiatric visit with medicine in hand.

Mental Health Initiative Overview

Americares U.S. Program is the largest provider of medical aid to the U.S. health care safety net. We support a network of more than 900 clinics and health centers serving 5 million people in need. Americares U.S. partners span the full spectrum of the health care safety net, including free and charitable clinics, community health centers, behavioral health providers, rural health centers, county health departments, nonprofit hospitals and charitable pharmacies.

In May of 2015, Americares launched the Mental Health Initiative (MHI) to further expand our partner network into

the behavioral health sector with support from two family foundations. Through this work, Americares provides free psychotropic and primary care medicine to behavioral health providers giving low-income, uninsured and underinsured people access to the critical medicines they need. Our targeted gift-in-kind donations of medicine, supplies and hygiene products allow behavioral health providers to offer additional health care services, reduce out-of-pocket expenses for clients and expand treatment options.

MHI Network

The MHI was launched in May 2015 as a 10-state pilot demonstration; the ten states selected to participate in the original pilot were California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. When the program launched, Americares had six behavioral health partners in four states. After a year of piloting the MHI, Americares expanded the program nationally in 2016 in partnership with the National Council for Behavioral Health.

In its first year and a half, Americares MHI has:



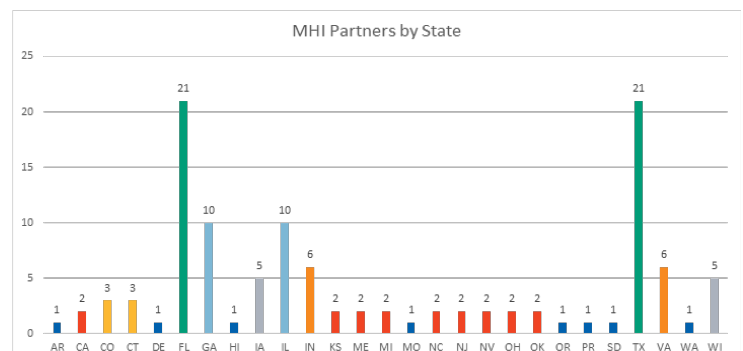
Delivered more than **\$23** million in psychotropic medicine and more than **\$18** million in primary care medicine, supplies and hygiene products to behavioral health providers.



Established a network of **116** behavioral health providers in **26** states.



Provided enough psychotropic medicine to fill a year's worth of monthly prescriptions for more than **5,000** clients.



Partner Eligibility and Vetting Process

To become an Americares partner of the MHI, institutions have to meet all of the following eligibility criteria:

- Nonprofit mental or behavioral health care facility or primary care facility that provides behavioral health care;
- Serve patients who are uninsured or underinsured and whose income is $\leq 300\%$ of the federal poverty level;
- Employ inventory management procedures to maintain supply chain integrity, track the distribution and usage of Americares donated products, and ensure these products are provided only to eligible patients; and
- Must have the legal authority to receive and dispense prescription medicine.

Partners of Americares MHI go through the following vetting and qualification process:

1. Complete an online application;
2. Complete a phone assessment with an Americares staff member;
3. Provide copies of medical and facility related licenses; and
4. Sign a biannual Partnership Agreement and an annual Medical Professional Agreement of Responsibility.

The application and agreement process documents how each partner satisfies the eligibility criteria requirements and also further ensures that all partners are fully informed of and agree to adhere to all product donation requirements, the most critical of which include:

- Partners agree to not charge for, sell, trade or return donated products for credit;
- Partners agree to segregate donated products to ensure they are given only to eligible patients;
- When preparing to dispose of expired products, partners agree to segregate donated products to prevent any chance of return for credit;
- If segregation systems are not in place, partners agree to adhere stickers provided by Americares to each container of medicine to distinguish them from products that were not donated and further ensure their proper segregation, dispensing or destruction; and
- Partners agree to participate in the U.S. Program's Supply Chain Audit to review their storage, use and destruction of products donated by Americares.

Ongoing Partnership Process

- The U.S. Program sends out a weekly email to partners with active agreements to inform them of the products that are available for order.
- Partners that wish to place an order log into Americares USAccess web site where they can place an order for products in the quantities they need.
- All orders are reviewed by Americares staff before shipment to ensure that donor requirements are met and that donated products are distributed equitably among the partnership network.
- Americares ships all products to partners at no cost to partners.

About Americares

Americares is a health-focused international relief and development organization that responds to people affected by poverty or disaster with life-changing health programs, medicine and medical supplies. Each year, Americares reaches more than 90 countries and all 50 U.S. states with over \$500 million in innovative health programs and quality medical aid. Americares is the world's leading nonprofit provider of donated medicine and medical supplies. For more information, visit americares.org.