



KANSAS LEGISLATIVE
DIVISION *of*
POST AUDIT

The Rundown podcast transcript for Performance Audit report titled ***Evaluating Mental Health and Substance Abuse Initiatives to Improve Outcomes*** – Released August 2021

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [00:00]

Welcome to The Rundown, your source for the latest news and updates from the Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, featuring LPA staff talking about recently released audit reports and discussing findings, key takeaways, and why it matters. I'm Brad Hoff. In August 2021, Legislative Post Audit released a performance audit that identified what practices or programs state funded mental health and substance abuse providers report using, how well they appear to be working, and how they compare to those in other states. I'm with Heidi Zimmerman, principal auditor at Legislative Post Audit, who supervised the audit. Heidi, welcome back to The Rundown and thanks for taking the time to discuss the report's findings today.

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [00:45]

Thanks for having me, Brad.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [00:47]

What state funded substance abuse programs exist in Kansas and which agencies oversee them?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [00:55]

So, there are actually a number of state funded mental health or substance abuse programs in the state. So, by state funded program, we mean a program where the state pays in total or a portion of the cost for an individual to receive mental health or substance abuse treatment. So, there are actually four agencies that oversee the major state funded treatment programs in Kansas. So, three of those agencies oversee at least one program that covers individuals who are convicted of a crime. So, the Department of Corrections oversees the programs that provide mental health and substance abuse services to prisoners or to those who are out on parole. The Sentencing Commission oversees the Senate bill 123 program, which provides substance abuse treatment to those convicted of certain drug crimes. And then the Department of Aging and Disability Services, which is KDADS oversees a program that provides treatment for individuals who have been convicted of a third or subsequent DUI. Then KDADS also oversees other programs and other entities that provide mental health or substance abuse services. So, this includes programs that provide treatment to people who don't qualify for Medicaid but make less than 200%

of the federal poverty line. They also oversee the state hospitals and the community mental health centers. And then last the department of health and environment oversees Medicaid, which pays for a certain mental health and substance abuse treatment services to those who qualify for Medicaid.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [02:35]

Who provides the substance abuse and mental health services and how many providers are there in Kansas?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [02:40]

So, state funded substance abuse and mental health treatment in Kansas is provided through a network of approved treatment providers. So, typically the state licenses providers to provide services to those who qualify for a specific program. So, for example, the Kansas Sentencing Commission approves providers who provide substance abuse treatment services to those people who are seeking treatment under Senate bill 123. So, someone who qualifies for a particular state funded program can seek treatment from any approved provider and approved providers can include things such as community mental health centers or private practitioners or non-profit organizations, but across the various programs, there are approximately 200 approved private, public and non-profit providers in Kansas.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [03:36]

Now, the team talked with 23 different providers to collect information on the types of programs and practices they use. What did they tell you?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [03:47]

So, we talked to 23 providers across the state. Now we chose those 23 to get a good cross section of all Kansas providers in terms of location and size, but we asked them to tell us the programs and practices that they use. And so those 23 providers reported about 95 different programs and practices to us. And that included things such as cognitive behavioral therapies, trauma informed care, and motivational interviewing.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [04:17]

One of the objectives of the audit was to report on how well the programs and practices that providers use appear to work. However, the report noted that the lack of reliable outcomes data kept the team from determining the effectiveness of substance abuse and mental health treatment in Kansas. Talk about why that was the case.

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [04:37]

So, we actually encountered a number of issues here. Some of the more general difficulties though that we encountered were that I said in assessing effectiveness, was that determining what a reasonable successful outcome is, can vary based on the illness. So, someone who is seeking treatment for substance use disorder may have a successful outcome for them, might look very different from what a successful outcome would look like for someone who was getting treatment for schizophrenia. And so those variations and kind of the variety in illnesses does pose a

little bit of a problem there in really assessing effectiveness. One of the other things that we encountered was that this population tends to be a little bit transient. It can be hard to collect outcomes data from this group for more than a very short amount of time after treatment and so because you might not be able to find them or follow up with them for a long period of time, it can be difficult to really understand what the long-term effects of treatment might be. We also ran into some very specific problems though, like none of the four agencies maintained complete or reliable outcomes data. So, for example, the Sentencing Commission doesn't currently collect any outcomes data and KDADS collects data for some individuals, but it's not complete. It's not very reliable and so that also caused us a little bit of a problem as well. We also looked to the providers to see if maybe they had some data that we could maybe use and some of them do try to collect their own outcomes, data, but this isn't really required and so it's very inconsistent from provider to provider. So, basically this all boils down to the combination of all these issues simply meant that we did not have the data we needed to address this part of the objective,

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [06:33]

Even though the team could not determine how well the programs and practices are working in Kansas for the team did evaluate whether providers used evidence based practices, talk about the work the team did in this area, and what you found.

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [06:47]

So, we took the 11 practices that providers mentioned most frequently to us. So, was basically the practices and programs that are most commonly used. And we reviewed the national and international academic research to determine if those practices had had evidence supporting their effectiveness. So, what we found was that out of the 11 that we looked out, we found that eight of them had moderate to strong evidence supporting their effectiveness. So, for example, cognitive behavioral therapy had strong support that it was effective across pretty much all the research that we looked at. The other seven had moderate support. For those seven, they did have some good evidence behind them, but it tended to come with a little bit of a caveat, so they were, so we kind of categorize them as moderate support rather than strong support. For the other three though, was a little different story. Two of them had only weak evidence that they were effective and the remaining one, the quality of the research was very poor and so we just weren't able to determine one way or the other whether it's effective.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [07:54]

As you had mentioned earlier, you talked to these providers during these interviews, they mentioned that there are challenges that exist to provide mental health and substance abuse services. What were the challenges that they cited?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [08:08]

So, the 23 providers that we talked to consistently mentioned a few things. So, first that funding shortages were making it difficult for them to provide services to the number of people. They felt really needed treatment. Specifically, some of them noted that Medicaid rates have not been increased since the early 2000s and that that was contributing to some of their funding issues. Second, that the providers

noted some difficulties in finding qualified staff, especially some of the providers in Western Kansas mentioned, you know, they have kind of smaller labor pools and so sometimes finding staff is difficult for them. Obviously if you're short-staffed, then it makes difficult, makes it more difficult to provide services. Last, some of the rural providers noted problems with a lack of transportation. Obviously, if people can't get to you, then it's difficult for you to provide services to them and so those were probably the main things that we heard from the providers that we talked to.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [09:12]

The second objective of the audit was to determine how Kansas substance abuse and mental health programs and services compared to those in other states. So, how does Kansas compare to the selected states you looked at?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [09:25]

Kansas actually compares pretty well. So, we chose five states that were similar to Kansas in terms of things like population and income. And the five states that we looked at were Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska, Nevada, and South Dakota and we used 2019 data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which is a federal agency that collects data from all 50 states. We used 2019 data simply because that was the most recent data that was publicly available. So, some of the information they collect is on the types of programs and services that mental health and substance abuse providers offer. So, we compared Kansas providers to those five states across about 40 different metrics, and so overall Kansas is pretty similar to the other states in terms of the services and programs that providers offer. For example, about 98% of substance abuse providers in Kansas reported providing relapse prevention services. On average, 95% of providers in the other five states did. So, Kansas is obviously very similar in that area and again overall, Kansas was quite similar to the other states, but there were a few exceptions. And so, for example, in Kansas, 64% of mental health providers offered trauma counseling, but on average, 84% of providers in the other states did. So, another place where Kansas really stood out was that 58% of Kansas providers offered telemedicine services, but only 46% on average of the providers in the other five states did. So, overall pretty similar, the occasional exception.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [11:07]

Finally, what is the main takeaway of this audit?

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [11:11]

Providers are using many practices and programs that have some evidence of effectiveness, which of course is a very positive thing, but the lack of comprehensive and reliable data from state agencies makes it difficult to understand what kinds of outcomes Kansans are really experiencing. Some of the agencies we talked to are aware of the problems associated with that lack of data, so hopefully in the near future better data will mean that a better understanding can emerge of the effectiveness of these state funded programs.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [11:47]

Heidi Zimmerman is a principal auditor at Legislative Post Audit. She supervised an

audit that identified practices or programs that state funded mental health and substance abuse providers report using, how well they appear to be working, and how they compare to those in other states. Heidi, thank you for taking the time to discuss the audit findings with me.

Heidi Zimmerman, Supervisor and Principal Auditor: [12:07]

Thanks for having me, Brad.

Brad Hoff, Host and Recruiting and Training Manager: [12:08]

Thank you for listening to The Rundown. To receive newly released podcasts, subscribe to us on Spotify or Apple podcasts. For more information about Legislative Post Audit and to read our audit reports, visit kslpa.org. Follow us on Twitter @ksaudit or visit our Facebook page.

General Considerations/Copyright

The information in this podcast is not protected by copyright law in the United States. It may be copied and distributed without permission from LPA. LPA should be acknowledged as the source of the information. Listeners may not use this information to imply LPA endorsement of a commercial product or service or use it in a way that might be misleading.