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Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) Awarded \$4.9 Million Federal Grant to Improve Access to Youth Substance Use Care Across Connecticut

Farmington, CT – The Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) has been awarded a five-year, \$4.9 million grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for a groundbreaking new initiative that aims to integrate and improve access to care for thousands of Connecticut youth with co-occurring substance use and behavioral health disorders. CHDI is one of just [ten grant recipients nationwide](#). The University of Connecticut School of Social Work will serve as evaluator and key partner on the project.

The **Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment Prevention and Access to Treatment Hubs and Services (SBIRT PATHS) Initiative** will partner with established behavioral health providers around the state to create four regional “hubs” offering a “no wrong door” approach that integrates substance use and behavioral health care for young people ages 12-21. Over the next five years, these regional hubs will **screen 7,000 youth** for substance use disorder and provide integrated substance use and behavioral health services to an estimated **2,700 youth**.

“We are thrilled to play a role in bringing new federal funds into Connecticut to strengthen systems and bring innovative solutions to scale statewide,” **said Jeff Vanderploeg, Ph.D., President and CEO of CHDI**. “This initiative will bridge persistent gaps between behavioral health and substance use treatment and between the youth and adult behavioral health systems. It represents a pivotal step in Connecticut’s journey towards a fully integrated behavioral health system.”

“There has been a longstanding relationship between CHDI and the School of Social Work to improve the lives of individuals and communities and advance social justice,” added **Laura Curran, MSW, PhD, Dean and Professor of the UConn School of Social Work**. “We are excited to formalize this partnership and advance needed care for youth using substances in Connecticut through the SBIRT PATHS grant.”

Youth substance use is a concern for many families, yet research shows that less than [40% of adolescents and only 16% of young adults who need substance use treatment receive it](#). And as the [nationwide opioid crisis](#) continues, it is critical to intervene with youth using substances as early as possible. While **substance use and other behavioral health disorders often occur together, they are frequently treated separately** due to stigma, insufficient provider training, gaps between adult and youth-serving systems, and lack of insurance reimbursement for non-clinical services, reducing access to treatment.

"When I worked in general youth behavioral health settings, I saw that many staff didn't have the training or support to identify and treat substance use," said CHDI's Christine Hauser, LCSW, LADC, one of the project's leads and a former clinician. "There's a huge need to invest in a workforce that can address both substance use and mental health at the same time, in places where youth and families are already getting care. This initiative is an opportunity to improve access to care and prevent worsening substance use for thousands of Connecticut youth and their families."

CHDI will train and provide ongoing technical assistance to providers in key evidence-based practices, including the *Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)*, *Motivational Enhancement Therapy/Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MET/CBT)*, and *Wraparound* service models.

Four well-established community-based providers around the state will form the regional SBIRT PATHS hubs:

- The Child and Family Agency (New London County)
- Child and Family Guidance Clinic (Fairfield County)
- Clifford Beers Community Care Center (New Haven County)
- Community Health Resources (Hartford and Windham Counties)

These providers serve the counties with the highest percentages of youth living below the poverty line. In the past year, more than **one in five youth served by these providers reported substance use** in their initial behavioral health assessments. Each provider will receive pass-through funds from the SAMHSA grant to support a full-time service coordinator at each hub – a critical role not currently reimbursable through insurance – and related work.

An Advisory Committee of diverse stakeholders, including members with lived experience with substance use and/or co-occurring disorders, will guide SBIRT PATHS over the next five years. Organizational partners include the **UConn School of Social Work, the Center for Behavioral Health Integration, Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR), FAVOR, Inc., the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).**

SBIRT PATHS is the latest initiative in a statewide effort led by CHDI to expand [evidence-based substance use care and treatment](#) for youth. It is a significant step toward fully integrated youth mental health and substance use care in Connecticut, ultimately fostering healthier communities and brighter futures.

Additional Background Info: [CHDI Issue Brief: Improving Early Substance Use Care for Youth](#)

About CHDI

The Child Health and Development Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the behavioral health and well-being of children in Connecticut and beyond. We advance effective and integrated system, practice, and policy solutions that result in equitable and optimal behavioral health and well-being for children, youth, and families. Learn more about us at www.chdi.org.

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