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Ohio receives one of 24 federal grants to expand the system of care for teens and young adults with mental illnesses

(Columbus) “Transitional youth are the ones in need of the most help because they are at the point in their life where they can either drown in poverty and depression or get the help they need to turn their life around to become productive members of society.” This quote from an Ohio young adult with a mental illness is the backdrop for work that will be undertaken by the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) utilizing a federal System of Care Expansion Planning grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Ohio will use the one-year grant of \$772,095 toward Engaging the New Generation to Achieve their Goals through Empowerment (ENGAGE). The ENGAGE project will develop the state and local infrastructure across child- and adult-serving systems to support individuals ages 14-21 with serious mental health conditions, and their families. A social marketing plan will be created, as well as the design of housing and peer-support services.

Ohio’s population of youth and young adults ages 14-21 totals 1,287,162, with more than 90,000 having serious emotional disturbances or serious mental illnesses. According to Kay Rietz, chief of ODMH’s Office of Children, Families and Prevention, “This population can be described as falling of the cliff at the divide between child-serving and adult-serving health and human service systems. Even when youth have sufficient health care coverage and life skills to access adult mental health services, they may refuse to engage in services that are perceived as unresponsive to their individual needs and life goals.”

ENGAGE will foster a one-year strategic-planning process to improve outcomes for transition-age youth and young adults. All planning, policy decisions and programmatic activities will be inclusive of and driven by the population they are intended to support: youth, young adults in transition and their families.

The state leadership team is also made up of representatives and advocates from child- and adult-serving systems including behavioral health, child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, education, developmental disabilities, rehabilitation services, housing and employment/vocational services. Additional goals will include identifying core competencies for cross-system providers, protocols for health integration during the transition from youth to adult services, strategies for streamlining services, and methods to enhance youth-driven and family-guided involvement.

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John R. Kasich, Governor • **Tracy J. Plouck**, Director

Establishing mental health as a cornerstone of overall health

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