

Forensic Community Support Team Plus
Submitted to the Durham County Board of Commissioners

Compared with the general population, people with mental illnesses are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. According to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics latest report](#) (2017) on mental health conditions in jail and prison, rates of mental health concerns and serious psychological distress were 3 to 5 times higher in the incarcerated population compared with the general population. With the onset of COVID-19 and related policies to curb the spread of the virus, the need for mental health and additional supports has increased.

In 2022, Durham County completed a needs analysis and updated the community's Sequential Intercept Map. There were four key takeaways from the needs analysis:

- (1) Durham has a committed community of people, including government leaders, investing in programs and interventions for justice-involved people with mental illnesses
- (2) Service capacity is limited, particularly for uninsured people and those involved with the criminal justice system
- (3) Peer support specialists offer much needed expertise from lived experience with mental illness, substance use, and/or criminal justice system involvement and this peer support network should be expanded
- (4) Housing is a treatment intervention that plays a vital role in the well being of our community members, especially those with mental illnesses

As a follow up to the 2022 report, the Durham County Stepping Up Initiative established the Access to Services subcommittee to continue to examine the capacity of assertive community treatment teams (ACTT) and community support teams (CST) and to identify opportunities for program enhancement. Over the last several months, the committee has been meeting with local mental health service providers of both ACTT and CST services and has developed this proposal to fund an enhanced forensic community support team. This proposal builds on each of the key findings of the report by leveraging the support of the community and county government to provide enhanced services, housing assistance, and peer support to justice-involved people with serious mental illnesses.

Specifically, we request that Durham County Government allocate available funding to support a community support team that enhances the current Medicaid and IPRS service definition by: (1) adding a psychiatric nurse (e.g., LPN), (2) dedicating 100% of the caseload to Durham residents who are involved in the criminal justice system (e.g., courts, probation and post-release, and re-entry from jail or prison), and (3) providing housing assistance. We are referring to this enhanced model as Forensic CST-plus or **FCST+**.

Team composition

FCST+ would be comprised of the four team members required by the NC Medicaid service definition ([NC Medicaid: Community Support Team, 8A-6. \(ncdhhs.gov\)](#)):

- One full-time equivalent (FTE) dedicated Team Lead who is a licensed clinician

- One FTE dedicated team member who is a licensed substance use service professional
- Two FTE team members that are Qualified Professionals, Associate Professionals, Paraprofessionals or NC Certified Peer Support Specialist (NCCPSS). For the FCST+ model, at least one of these two FTE positions will be a peer support specialist.

In addition to these four required positions, FCST+ would include a psychiatric nurse (e.g., LPN). The psychiatric nurse would perform blood draws, injections, and support the clients through the patient assistance program process.

Cost

Standard CST: According to local service providers, the estimated cost for a standard CST team is approximately \$375,000 annually.

Psychiatric nurse: Including a psychiatric nurse would increase the cost of the model by \$84,000. This position will perform blood draws and injections, support clients through the patient assistance program process and, if the program is administered by an agency with an ACT team, could be supervised by the provider's existing RN.

The average salary for a LPN in NC varies but the median salary is \$49,175 (salary.com). However, given the demand for nurses, we have estimated a salary of \$70,000. With an estimated fringe/benefit of 20%, the estimated cost is \$84,000.

Housing support: Additionally, we recommend supplemental funding for housing assistance (e.g., temporary housing, vouchers, hotels) of approximately \$35,000. The addition of housing support corresponds to the most recent changes in CST service definitions that place additional focus on housing stability. Should the county have additional funds available, we recommend increasing the amount of housing assistance.

Cost summary (annual):

Standard CST:	\$375,000
Psychiatric nurse:	\$84,000
Housing support:	\$35,000

In total, the approximate cost of FCST+ for one year is \$494,000.

Caseload capacity and continuity of care

The standard CST service definition requires a 12:1 ratio between staff and clients. Due to the low client to staff ratio and the high level of client need, this team would expect to serve between 45-60 clients over the course of a year.

The committee also recommends that provider selection would consider the service array of applicants as well as the type of expertise their treatment teams provide. For example, a review of applicants should prioritize service providers with a robust continuum of care such that a client's support could be enhanced or stepped down as needed. Additionally, it is possible that mental health service providers that have existing CST and ACTT services

would have either lower startup costs or a faster implementation timeline given their existing infrastructure that supports these multi-disciplinary teams. In addition, providers that have staff expertise in navigating housing resources and providing employment or vocational support to clients should be prioritized.

Evaluation

At the end of each funded year, we recommend that Durham County require the selected service provider to submit a brief program evaluation of Forensic CST+. In advance of the contracting process, the data subcommittee of the SUI will provide recommendations to Durham County about potential program indicators and outcomes as well as expectations for reporting progress and findings. This evaluation will include program metrics such as clients served and types of assistance provided, as well as client outcomes pertaining to mental health and criminal justice system involvement.

Administration options

The most feasible option for administering the funds for FCST+ is for Durham County to administer funds to Alliance Health who would then issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) and subcontract county funds to the selected service provider. The rationale for this approach is that Alliance Health has the expertise and infrastructure and is the entity tasked with managing the community's service array and authorizing services for both Medicaid and IPRS.

Program Duration, Sustainability, and Medicaid expansion

If available, the committee recommends multi-year funding for 2 or 3 years to support program implementation. Notably, providers with established CST or ACTT services may not need 3 years of funding given their existing infrastructure and expertise in providing enhanced, multidisciplinary services. Contracting with an existing provider of CST and other enhanced services (e.g., ACTT) and one that also has IPRS-funded programs, would enhance the longer-term sustainability and feasibility of this model. Given the recent passage of Medicaid expansion, it is our hope that these county funds could be used as the startup support that providers would need to hire staff to establish FCST+. In the first year of the program, county dollars would provide this salary support; however, as Medicaid expansion moves forward, a larger number of those on the caseload will likely be approved for Medicaid, thus providing a more sustainable revenue source for the provider. Similarly, although IPRS funding is less predictable and more limited, choosing a mental health provider with existing IPRS programs means that as the waitlist for IPRS CST slots opens, the provider can bill for services, again providing a more sustainable revenue source.