



AHA TRANSFORMATION TALKS

STRATEGIES FOR REIMAGINING HEALTH CARE

Disrupting Behavioral Health: Achieving Greater Access and Equity

“ Without mental health there can be no true physical health. ”

– Dr. Brock Chisholm, first director-general of the World Health Organization

Behavioral health is essential not only to individual health, but also population health. Increasing access to behavioral health services can improve outcomes and lower costs. Yet, timely access to affordable services remains a challenge for many Americans. Less than half the adults with any mental health disorder receive treatment. Moreover, certain populations have less access to care:



While **48 percent** of white adults with mental illness receive services, only **31 percent** of African-American and Hispanic adults and **22 percent** of Asian-American adults with mental illness receive services.



LGBTQ Americans are at greater risk for depression and substance use disorders, and **nearly one-third** of LGBTQ youth are reported to have attempted suicide at least once in the past year.



60 percent of rural America is underserved for behavioral health needs, and **more than 85 percent** of the nation's behavioral health professional shortage areas are located in rural America.

AHA TRANSFORMATION TALKS

STRATEGIES FOR REIMAGINING HEALTH CARE

To address these challenges, hospitals and health systems are examining ways to increase access to care in more appropriate settings through forging community partnerships, using telebehavioral health and other digital solutions, integrating physical and behavioral health care, and more. All working towards the goal of providing access to appropriate behavioral health caregivers at the right time and place.

For example:

Leveraging their scale and influence, community health providers are creating innovative regional systems of behavioral health care delivery through creative contracting, electronic health record system integration and the power of working together in creative ways. Such delivery systems, can greatly reduce avoidable hospital days, decrease referrals to statewide mental health facilities and readmissions, while raising outpatient appointment attendance rates.

By making it more convenient for patients to access care and partnering to leverage regional resources more effectively, we can help overcome the disparities that exist in behavioral health today.



To learn more, visit our AHA Transformation Talks [resources page](#).

Discussion Questions:

1. **What are the greatest challenges or impediments to improving access to behavioral health and how do we overcome them? How has the pandemic changed the headwinds and tailwinds to expanding access?**
2. **How can health care leaders and their community partners best advance and sustain efforts to improve access to behavioral health services?**
3. **Some regional behavioral health networks have seen positive results. What makes these successful? What factors are needed to create and sustain a regional network? How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the network?**
4. **How can resource-stretched health care organizations best optimize their efforts to increase access to behavioral health services?**