

Help is on the way

Mental Health Board awards more than \$9 million

By Teresa Inserra
For the Leader

The Jefferson County Community Mental Health Fund Board recently awarded \$9,360,000 to 14 agencies for adult and children services in Jefferson County.

Board Chairperson Mary Dunnegan said all the organizations who applied offer worthwhile services, but JCCMHFB couldn't offer funds to all of them.

"Unfortunately, the requests totaled over \$16 million, exceeding over \$7 million the amount of money projected the JCCMHFB will receive during the grant period," Dunnegan said.

Executive Director Nick Davis said the agency received requests for more than \$11 million in children's services funds and more than \$5.5 million in adult service funds.

The awards for the Children's Service Fund (CSF) are for 2024-2025 and total \$6.3 million.

Agencies that received those funds include:

- Aspen: \$67,000
- Atlas Youth Outreach: \$132,000
- CHADS Coalition: \$73,150 (two programs)
- Chestnut Health Systems: 325,000
- Compass Health Network: \$4,870,000 (nine programs)
- De Soto School District: \$59,482.49
- Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition: \$155,000
- Jefferson Franklin Community Action Corporation: \$90,867.51
- Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri: \$155,000
- Preferred Family Healthcare: \$150,000
- PreventEd: \$100,000
- St. Louis Counseling: \$55,000
- UMSL: \$67,500

The awards for the Adult Mental Health Fund (MHF) are for 2024 and total \$3,060,000.

Agencies that received those funds include:

- Aspen: \$67,500
- Chestnut Health Systems: \$395,000
- Compass Health Network: \$2,232,500 (seven programs)
- Jefferson Franklin Community Action Corporation: \$70,000
- LIV Recovery Sober Living: \$250,000
- PreventEd: \$45,000

Davis said the goal when deciding how to distribute the funds is to address as many needs in the community in the most efficient way possible.

He said this year the board used a more data-driven process in awarding funds.

Davis said this spring, 109 staff from the 11 public school districts in Jefferson County completed a survey assessment about school-based behavioral/mental health-focused programs and needs.

School staff members identified anger management as the most critical behavioral health/mental health issue students were facing, followed by anxiety. They also rated depression and self-harm/suicide among the top issues students face.

When awarding the money, Davis said the board looked at organizations that could address those needs.

Funding recipients must meet statute requirements, such as nonprofit status, and they must use the funds within Jefferson County.

When the Mental Health Fund Board began about 40 years ago, Comtre was the sole mental health provider in the county. Dunnegan said until last year, Comtre worked as a team with the board.

Davis said in recent years, Comtre received more than 90 percent of funds.

In July, Comtre merged with Compass Health Network and remains a nonprofit, providing a number of programs and resources in the county.

"(Compass) did not receive 100 percent of their requests and really no one did," he said.

He said Compass serves a large number of residents and provides some services that other agencies are not providing. The funding awarded involves 16 Compass programs, including nine for children and seven for adults, he said.

Compass Chief Financial Officer Jake Krafve said the organization is beyond grateful for the board's funding.

"Compass Health will use board funding to increase access to care and expand mental health services to uninsured and underinsured Jefferson County residents," said Krafve, who lives in Byrnes Mill. "This will include expanded access to psychiatry, therapy, substance use disorder services, domestic violence and substance use disorder services at all our Jefferson County clinics.

"This funding will complement the investments Compass is making in new staffing and access points throughout the county and will be a crucial resource in our efforts to address the high demand for mental health services for children and adults."

Krafve said Compass Health representatives are excited about the children's service funding to allow Compass to place more mental health professionals in Jefferson County public schools.

"Also, this funding will allow us to keep our Child Advocacy Center in Festus viable, given this program relies on grant funding for sustainability," he said.

JCCMHFB was established and authorized by the Jefferson County Commission and state statute about 40 years ago to receive and administer a Jefferson County Mental Illness property tax levy (Adult Mental Health Fund - MHF) and a Community Children's Services sales tax (CSF).

The purpose of both taxes is to ensure a system of care is available for Jefferson County residents to receive appropriate comprehensive mental health and substance use treatment.

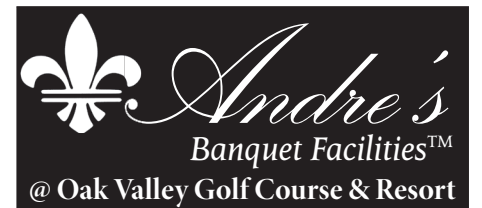
Davis said Jefferson County is one of only 10 counties in Missouri with a CSF sales tax.

The 1/8 cent sales tax is charged on all taxable goods purchased in Jefferson County, to be used solely for the purpose of children's mental health and substance use treatment.

The MHF is a property tax levy for all Jefferson County residents and businesses. The Mental Illness Levy funds comprehensive mental health, substance use treatment and psychiatric care for Jefferson County adults. This levy is set at .0857 cents per \$100 assessed value for 2023.

The JCCMHFB is made up of nine members and must include a physician. The nine members are appointed by the Jefferson County executive and approved by Jefferson County Council. At least one-third of the board must represent consumers of psychiatric services or the families of such consumers.

Davis said the board members feel fortunate to have funds available to address the mental health needs in the county.



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