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Conference Abstract

## Chronic Disease Management for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness

*Teresa Williams, Austin Travis County Integral Care, United States of America*

*William Wilson, Austin Travis County Integral Care, United States of America*

Correspondence to: **Fanny Trang**, Austin Travis County Integral Care, United States of America, E-mail: [fanny.trang@atcic.org](mailto:fanny.trang@atcic.org)

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### Abstract

People with serious mental illness (SMI) die on average 25 years sooner than the rest of the population according to recent studies. [1-3] This profound difference can be traced to health disparities and tobacco use among those with SMI. [1-3] These individuals are more than twice as likely to smoke cigarettes and more than 50 percent more likely to be obese compared to the rest of the population. [4]

Austin Travis County Integral Care (Integral Care) has successfully integrated behavioral and primary health care models to improve the health of people with SMI. This integration includes the implementation of the Chronic Disease Management (CDM) program to identify, treat, and improve the health of consumers with both SMI and chronic disease conditions. This project is currently in the third year of a five-year grant from the Federal Healthcare Transformation and Quality Improvement Program, which aims to increase access to and raise the quality of behavioral health services.

The objective of the CDM program is overall wellness for the participating individuals. This includes educating, encouraging and supporting individuals who have complex medical conditions and SMI as they learn to manage their illnesses and see beneficial reductions in health indicators (e.g. weight, cholesterol). All CDM staff are trained in Motivational Interviewing, Whole Health Action Management, Illness Management and Recovery, In Shape (Individual Self Health Action Empowerment Plan), and are Tobacco Cessation Treatment Specialists. CDM promotes recovery through person-centered care and a collaborative partnership and process led by the individuals themselves. Collaboration and support from community partners (YMCA and the Federally Qualified Health Center for Travis County) have allowed the program to begin working towards decreasing healthcare utilization, and participants are starting to see an improvement in their health.

Initial review of data drawn from electronic health records of individuals who have participated in a minimum of 40 CDM services shows this approach to be promising. Eighty-six percent showed improvement in blood pressure. Seventy percent show improved heart rates. Seventy-five percent have reduced waist measurement (average 1.5 inches) and 80% have lost weight (average 11 pounds). Integral Care hopes to expand health and wellness services to all individuals served as well as provide technical assistance and support to other Community Mental Health Centers wishing to incorporate health and wellness programs.

It is the responsibility of all behavioral health providers to address the elevated rates of chronic disease in this population. Current treatment practices rely heavily on psycho-pharmacology that directly contributes to the development of chronic medical conditions and make the effects of tobacco more appealing. [5] Challenges still exist in the ability to continue this program because current insurance guidelines do not provide reimbursement for nutrition, exercise, or tobacco cessation services in a behavioral health setting. By optimizing consumer health and use of the healthcare system, we will improve system outcomes and see an increase in monetary value through a reduced use of urgent and emergency medical services.

## Keywords

**integrated care; person centered care; serious mental illness; chronic disease management**

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