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Texas Leaders Launch New Effort to Help Veterans

AUSTIN – Texas leaders are committing more than \$1 million in state support for an innovative pilot program that will address Texas veterans’ mental health needs.

The new project, the Texas Veterans Initiative, will allow the state’s \$1 million investment to match local and private funds to expand and evaluate community-based mental health programs serving veterans and their families. If the pilot phase generates widespread interest from communities around the state, the Legislature could act in 2015 to expand it. The project will be funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

The decision to support the program with public dollars was made by Governor Rick Perry, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus.

“This unique public-private partnership represents an opportunity for the State of Texas, private donors and local communities to work together to create enduring solutions for addressing mental health needs for Texas veterans and their families,” Governor Perry said. “Each of the parties involved will share responsibility and accountability in helping improve the lives of Texas veterans who have already given so much to our nation.”

Funding will focus on regional collaborations that address severe mental health needs that are not currently met, as prioritized by each community.

“As a U.S. Air Force veteran myself, and a longtime advocate for honoring our commitments to our veterans, I support this effort to enhance the innovative approaches that local medical providers across Texas are developing to better serve our veteran communities,” added Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst. “This new partnership is the next transformative step in our efforts to ensure our veterans receive the quality of medical care they were promised and earned with their faithful service and sacrifices.”

Speaker Straus added, “This project brings communities together to provide better outcomes for Texans who served our country in uniform. It’s a smart, effective way to address an issue that affects veterans across this state. This pilot program is a very good starting point as we head into the legislative session.”

Projects funded by the Texas Veterans Initiative will be selected through a competitive statewide request for proposal process, administered through a memorandum of understanding between the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the non-profit Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. Applications will be developed by community organizations and funding partners, and thoroughly reviewed by a panel of Texas veterans, state and community leaders, and mental health experts.

The objective will be to award state funding to programs throughout Texas, with decisions made on successful applicants for the pilot phase no later than March 1, 2015. One goal of the pilot phase is to generate a backlog of promising programs that demonstrates both the interest and the types of programs that would be considered in subsequent phases of the Texas Veterans Initiative. Using private funding, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute will evaluate the outcomes of projects funded by the initiative and provide technical support and operational oversight to the program.

“The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs currently offers a variety of mental health programs but there are still many gaps and geographic barriers,” said Dr. Kyle Janek, Executive Commissioner for Texas Health and Human Services. “The Texas Veterans Initiative will create an opportunity for Texas communities to come together to fill those gaps and improve the delivery of mental health services to veterans and their families for years to come.”

“The Texas Veterans Initiative is designed to efficiently use state and local resources by identifying and filling gaps in services communities currently provide to veterans,” said Tom Luce, CEO of the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. “It is our goal to identify and evaluate promising practices in veterans’ mental health, and scale programs that work across the state.”

For more information about the Texas Veterans Initiative, and to respond to the request for proposals, please visit <http://www.texasstateofmind.org/texasveteransinitiative>.

About Texas Health and Human Services Commission

The mission of HHSC is to maintain and improve the health and human services system in Texas and to administer its programs in accordance with the highest standards of customer service and accountability for the effective use of funds. HHSC oversees the operations of the health and human services system, provides administrative oversight of Texas health and human services programs, and provides direct administration of some programs. For more information about HHSC, please visit <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/>.

About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that supports the implementation of policies and programs that help Texans obtain effective, efficient mental health care when and where they need it. The Institute’s vision is for Texas to be the national leader in treating people with mental health needs. For more information about the Meadows Institute, please visit <http://www.texasstateofmind.org/>.

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