

Still Leading the Way to Recovery

It was the first Federally-Qualified Community Mental Health Center in Maine, and almost sixty years later, Tri-County Mental Health Services continues to be a progressive leader in service delivery as well as a vital link in Maine's healthcare community.

Very simply, it means that we do not ask 'what is wrong with you' but rather we want to know 'what happened to you.'

Chris Copeland, Executive Director,
Tri-County Mental Health Services

At the forefront of innovations is Tri-County's philosophy of "Trauma-Informed, Recovery- Based Care." This approach has been embedded in the agency at all levels for almost six years. It is an approach that is catching on across the state and the nation.

Very simply, it means that we do not ask 'what is wrong with you' but rather want to know 'what happened to you'. It is an acknowledgement and understanding of the impact of trauma and violence on the lives of the people who rely on our services. Trauma can be the result of many sources – physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, exposure to violent acts and natural disasters, to name a few. Left unaddressed, trauma can contribute to chronic, long term health and mental health problems. Without attention to trauma-informed principles, treatment itself can re-traumatize patients.

Tri-County has been recognized as a leader in trauma-informed services, first selected by the State of Maine as the

pilot site for developing trauma-informed services for adults, and now as the lead agency in the six year initiative to bring the approach to a System of Care for Children called THRIVE.

Tri-County is also committed to advancing Integrated Primary Care (IPC) and has two current projects in partnership with the Maine Health Access Foundation. Integrated care combines medical and behavioral health services to better address the spectrum of problems that patients bring to their primary care providers (PCPs). The majority of these patients have either a physical ailment that is affected by stress, problems maintaining healthy lifestyles, or a psychological disorder, so it is both clinically appropriate and cost effective to integrate behavioral health with primary care. With healthcare reform on the horizon we believe that integrating care of the mind and body will prove to be cost effective and the highest quality care for our communities.

Recent research in Maine and across the nation illustrates the need to integrate mental health and substance abuse treatment into medical care. For example, 45% of Americans have one or more chronic health conditions and draw down 75% of treatment costs. Of these people, it is estimated that 52% have co-occurring substance abuse or mental illness, and 13% have all three. **Clearly, if we are going to 'bend the cost curve' in our healthcare system, we must address mental health and substance abuse issues.**

Healthcare disparities must also be addressed. It has been shown life expectancy for people with mental illness is a stunning 25 years shorter than the rest of the population. We're committed to addressing this tragic statistic by bringing the head and the body back

together in treatment. High performing, recovery-oriented trauma Informed mental health and substance abuse providers such as Tri-County Mental Health Services can and will play an enormously effective role in helping our healthcare partners improve health status. Our clinical programs include the most advanced evidence-based practices available, supported by efficient operational and quality monitoring practices in the industry.

With Maine's most comprehensive menu of services, most advanced evidence-based practices, and a staff of more than 500 employees committed to excellence, Tri-County is looking forward to the next 60 years with promise, progress, and pride.

About the Author



Chris Copeland is Executive Director of Tri-County Mental Health Services. A native of England, he joined Tri-County Mental Health Services in 1994. In the past 16 years,

he has held positions as Unit Manager for various programs within the agency, moving up to the position of Program Director in January 1998 and stepping in as the agency's Executive Director in 2004. He has been a leader in Maine's health and mental health field throughout his career, including as President and member of the Executive Committee of the Maine Association of Mental Health Services (MAMHS), the United Way, and more. Tri-County Mental Health Services serves more than 11,000 people each year from across Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford counties, as well as parts of Cumberland and York Counties. For more information, visit www.tcmhs.org