

Libraries for Health

Supporting Community Networks to Address Urgent Mental Health Needs

Libraries for Health is an innovative pilot initiative which seeks to address some of the most pressing unmet health needs facing communities including depression, anxiety, and other types of mental health conditions by building on the existing strengths of libraries as trusted and accessible community hubs. This initiative recognizes and elevates the opportunity for an anchor institution that is woven into our social infrastructure—a local public library—to purposefully support and tackle mental wellness, ideally before conditions become worse.

Barriers to Mental Health Care in Rural Communities

Although both urban and rural communities struggle with access to timely and affordable quality mental health services, issues in rural Texas communities are exacerbated due to inadequate mental health resources stemming from a known shortage of mental healthcare providers (MHP). Evidence of the gravity of the situation is demonstrated by the elevated rates of suicide in rural communities. In 2019 in Texas, 14% of the state's 3,891 suicides occurred in rural areas, though only accounting for 11% of Texas residents. This translates to a [suicide rate](#) of 18.89 per 100,000 residents in rural Texas, compared to 12.77 per 100,000 in metropolitan areas.

Beyond the shortage of MHPs, rural residents also face **barriers to care** including lack of reliable transportation, inadequate digital literacy skills, limited internet and technology access, reduced mobility, and underlying co-morbidities such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Why Libraries?

Public libraries are **trusted, accessible, integral community hubs and gathering places** that offer access to resources for those who may be uniquely at risk for mental health conditions and who may experience the greatest barriers in receiving care. Yet, limited funding availability, staff capacity, and expertise in mental wellness have made it challenging for libraries to offer mental health resources.

Mental health task-sharing is a proven approach to improving access to care that leverages the strengths of community-based organizations, like libraries, to expand the mental health workforce. Task-sharing models employ trained, culturally competent laypeople to help identify and address mental health concerns in the community. The *Libraries for Health* initiative uses the task-sharing model to provide non-clinical mental health supports and practices within libraries.

The *Libraries for Health* model builds upon successes in [other states](#) and [countries](#) using community-based organizations and trained members of the public where there is limited access to clinical mental health care. It also leverages libraries' strengths as trusted community information hubs. This approach is also a natural extension of the awareness of and interest in [trauma-informed care](#) existing across the public library sector.

What's Involved

St. David's Foundation selected seven library entities in Central Texas to participate in the *Libraries for Health* initiative. These libraries will receive non-clinical supports, practices, and behavioral health pathways to help their community move away from reliance on a referral only option to access community-based mental wellness resources. Library recipients will build or enhance their mental health resources and provide mental wellness services directly to adult library patrons through the engagement of peer support specialists and an MHP. This is essential groundwork to building community momentum and systems that will provide accessible mental health resources.

Key Elements of Support Include:

- Participating libraries will designate staff who will join a learning cohort with other funded public libraries;
- On-site access to a peer support specialist and a mental health provider to serve adult patrons;
- Peer support specialists supervised by a licensed mental health provider will provide evidence-based

mental health supports to adult library patrons as described above;

- Field-building activities to reach libraries, future supporters, and stakeholders to increase awareness of the initiative and foster long-term support.

How It Works



Step One

Person experiencing distress meets with peer support specialist at the library who offers evidence-based support and programs.



Step Two

Peer support specialist is overseen by a licensed mental health clinician who serves as referral source for more severe mental health issues.



Step Three

Increased access to mental wellness resources; mental health approaches strengthened by learning cohort – greater wellbeing in the community.

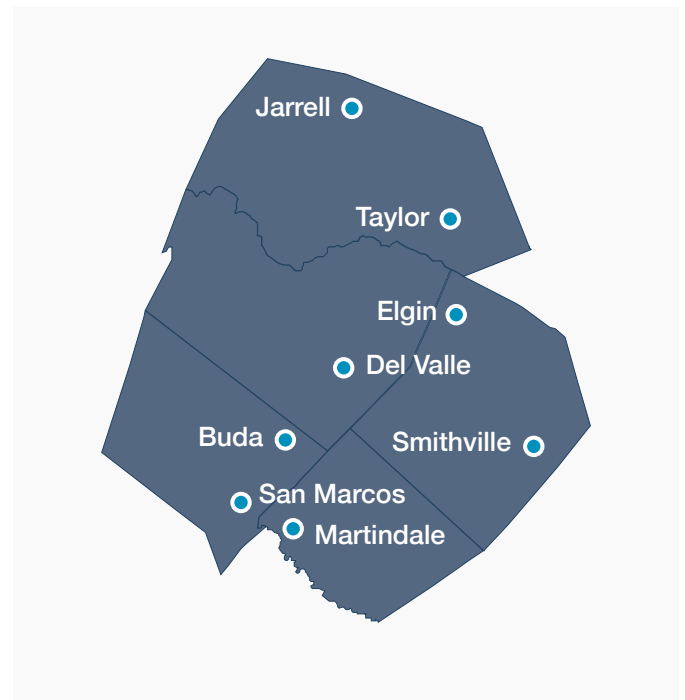
Libraries for Health Initiative Partner

St. David's Foundation has partnered with the [RAND Corporation](#) to implement and evaluate *Libraries for Health*. RAND brings expertise working on community-based mental wellness interventions including Robert Wood Johnson's Culture of Health project. Other partners will be Subject Matter Experts including the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and a Library Advisory Board (LAB) comprised of national and regional library leaders to provide feedback at major decision points and contextualize preliminary evaluative findings.

Libraries for Health Impact

St. David's Foundation designed the *Libraries for Health* initiative with multiple partners including libraries to **reimagine mental health care delivery services building on trusted community networks**. It's anticipated that the initiative's findings over a three-year period will help validate capacity-building approaches that demonstrably improve libraries' abilities to proactively deliver and evaluate community-centered mental wellness programming. By disseminating the evaluation findings statewide and nationally, *Libraries for Health* is poised to become a model program that will result in prototype training, tools, and other supports to help participating libraries sustain the initiative and promote adoption more widely by other libraries in Texas and beyond.

Participating Public Libraries in Central Texas



Questions and Contact Information



[Read more about *Libraries for Health*](#)



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