



NEWS RELEASE

Contact:

Mike Mullet
Community Relations Director
(770) 265-4250
michaelmullet@highlandrivers.org

Highland Rivers, Cherokee Sheriff to partner on co-response program

CANTON, Georgia – October 4, 2022 – Highland Rivers Behavioral Health will partner with the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office to develop a co-response program that will assist Cherokee residents in behavioral health crisis. Called Cherokee Partnership for Assistance, Treatment and Health (PATH), the program will be funded through a multi-year from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Cherokee PATH is slated to begin before the end of the year.

Co-response programs pair a uniformed law enforcement officer with a mental health clinician to respond to individuals in the community who are in behavioral health crisis, and are often dispatched through a county's 911 center. The teams are often able to resolve the crisis onsite in the community or transport the individual to a mental health facility instead of affecting an arrest and incarceration. Data from the Cobb PATH program – a partnership between Highland Rivers and the Cobb County Police Department – show that since that program began in 2019, fewer than 5% of calls have resulted in arrest.

“Co-response programs are very beneficial to communities on so many levels – not only do they link individuals in behavioral health crisis with the most appropriate level of intervention and care for their needs, the programs also save public resources by diverting individuals from emergency departments and the criminal justice system,” said Melanie Dallas, CEO of Highland Rivers Behavioral Health. “We are looking forward to working with Sheriff Reynolds and his team on this innovative approach to mental health treatment and community policing.”

As Cherokee County has grown, the burden of mental health and substance use has as well. Cherokee County is the eighth largest county in Georgia, and one of the fastest growing, with the population increasing by 20% between 2010 and 2019; by 2050 the population of Cherokee is projected to be 401,622, a 52.8% increase. The opioid-involved death rate in Cherokee for 2020 was 18.8 per 100,000 compared with 17.7 for Georgia, with overdose emergency department visits at 85.2 per 100,000 (substantially lower than the rate of 111.8 per 100,000 for Georgia as a

whole). Cherokee also has one of the largest veteran populations in the state, representing 7% of the county's population.

“We are very excited about teaming up with Highland Rivers for this co-response program,” said Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds. “We are confident this behavioral health-law enforcement collaboration will be beneficial to our citizens in crisis who might have traditionally ended up incarcerated.”

The SAMHSA funding will complement a recent grant received by Highland Rivers from the Veterans Administration that will implement an emergency crisis response team specifically for veterans in Cherokee and Pickens counties, as well as enhancing other supports for local veterans. Combined, the two grants will bring significant new resources to Cherokee County over the next four years to support mental health crisis intervention and diversion – enabling clinicians, law enforcement agencies, veterans organizations and community partners to intervene earlier to help individuals with behavioral health needs in Cherokee County and link them more efficiently to local services.

About Highland Rivers Behavioral Health

Highland Rivers Behavioral Health is Georgia's largest public safety net behavioral health agency, providing comprehensive treatment, support and recovery services for adults, children, families and veterans affected by mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and intellectual developmental disabilities. With an integrated continuum of services that includes crisis stabilization, outpatient, residential, community-based services and more, Highland Rivers Behavioral Health operates more than two-dozen treatment facilities across a 13-county, 4,700-square mile area of Northwest Georgia that includes Bartow, Cherokee, Cobb, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk and Whitfield counties, and serves approximately 20,000 individuals annually. Highland Rivers Behavioral Health is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International and is a Tier 1 safety net Core Provider for the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. For more information, visit www.highlandrivers.org.

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