

CASE STUDY

Mental Health Urgent Assessment Centre

The Mental Health Urgent Assessment Centre (MHUAC) within Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation Trust (LPFT) was designed as a new service delivery model to offer a safe and therapeutic environment for patients experiencing mental health crisis. The aim is to reduce whole system pressures by directing patients away from Emergency Departments (ED) and enabling onward referral to other more suitable mental health services. MHUAC was set up with winter funding in January 2022.

Health Innovation East Midlands (HIEM) awarded funding to support the evaluation.

When people are in mental health crisis they are at their most vulnerable. It is essential that they receive the care and support they need as quickly as possible, in a place they can feel safe, and they are supported by people who understand their needs. However, patients presenting to the ED in mental health crisis often face long wait times (40% of patients wait over six hours for care) and inappropriate environments and are seen by non-specialist staff. These presentations also put additional strain on already stretched NHS resources.

The patients using the MHUAC were initially adults, ranging from 18 upwards. As of December 2023, the service became an all age pathway accepting Children and young people. The majority of patients attending are between 30 and 45 years old.

What we did:

HIEM supported independent evaluation of the MHUAC. On finding successful outcomes, we have shared the results widely to encourage discussion and wider adoption. The evaluation outcomes were presented to the health innovation networks and shared with the East Midlands Alliance for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism. We also hosted a webinar in January 2024 to showcase the outputs.

HIEM's Analytics and Evaluation Services team are creating a budget impact model for anyone looking to adopt a similar project to determine what the benefits might be.

Evidence collected also suggests that the MHUAC is delivering cost benefits – a reduction in inpatient attendances and relapses have amounted to around £1,209,350 of savings for the Trust. These benefits could reach over £14.4m annually if scaled up across the Midlands.

Outcomes:

During the period of the evaluation (January 2022 – October 2022):

- **117 re-attendances were avoided** in the six months following initial presentation.
- **85% of staff and patients** felt that the MHUAC was a better alternative to patients with mental health crises being assessed and treated in the Emergency Department (ED).
- **More than two-thirds** of patients completed the assessment process within three hours.

Furthermore:

- Patients receive the most appropriate, specialist care.
- Patients at the MHUAC have better outcomes than patients who attend ED.
- Interview and survey data found that the MHUAC provides patients with significant resources to help them better access community services and/or care for their conditions better at home.
- An increase in Section 136 orders adds pressure to the police force. The MHUAC aims to reduce these pressures through having specific Section 136 suites where the police can hand over patients quickly.
- Although data on ambulance turnaround times cannot be split between MHUAC and ED at this point, qualitative findings have indicated the MHUAC has significantly cut ambulance turnaround times.

Following the review/evaluation of the pilot a business case was submitted for recurrent funding, which was subsequently successful. The trust was able to increase the workforce to include Band 7 clinicians, administrator staff and a part time consultant psychiatrist.

A further business case has been written to replicate the service in Boston- finances pending.

Conclusion:

Working with partners was key. The LPT team worked alongside the local acute hospital trust- particularly A&E colleagues, Lincolnshire Police & East Midlands Ambulance Service. All contributed to the development of the pathway.

The evaluation also generated several considerations to improve the service both at the Lincolnshire site and to aid other Trusts if the MHUAC model were to expand to other sites.

“Quick access to trained mental health nurses and doctors in a quiet, relaxed setting has been more beneficial than the stress of ED and waiting times.”

“being seen straight away by a mental health professional is really important as it helps to de-escalate situations quicker, instead of waiting in A&E.”

Contact us

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