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USVI Receives \$600,000 Grant to Expand Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder

Frederiksted Healthcare receives \$600,000 in federal funding from HRSA to expand mental health and substance use disorder services, addressing the growing need for accessible behavioral healthcare in underserved U.S. Virgin Islands communities

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Frederiksted Healthcare, Inc., a community health center in the U.S. Virgin Islands, has been awarded \$600,000 by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to enhance and broaden its mental health and substance use disorder services.

This funding comes as part of the Biden administration's continued efforts to address mental health and the opioid crisis, key pillars of the administration's Unity Agenda for the nation.

HRSA's funding aims to assist community health centers like Frederiksted Healthcare, which play a critical role in providing care to the uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid enrollees. By focusing on expanding behavioral health services, these grants are intended to tackle pressing mental health challenges and substance use issues within vulnerable communities. These centers offer accessible, culturally competent, and stigma-free care to individuals in need.

A recent report by Mental Health America underscores the importance of such initiatives. The State of Mental Health in America 2024 found that many individuals with substance use disorders are not receiving necessary treatment. Additionally, one in five youth experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year, and over half of them did not receive treatment. The report also highlighted that 10 percent of adults living with a mental illness remain uninsured.

HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra emphasized the importance of behavioral health care in underserved communities. "Access to behavioral health care is critical for communities of color and underserved groups," Becerra stated. "HRSA-funded health centers have a proven record of success in reaching underserved communities. This funding expands their access to essential behavioral health services that will benefit entire communities."

Carole Johnson, HRSA Administrator, echoed these sentiments, noting the strides made under the Biden administration to improve healthcare access. "Mental health and substance use disorder treatment are essential elements of primary care, and there should be no wrong door for families to get the behavioral health care they need," said Johnson.

As part of the Fiscal Year 2025 President's budget, the Biden-Harris Administration aims to mandate and fund mental health and substance use disorder services in all HRSA-supported health centers, which collectively serve more than 31 million people across the U.S. However, currently, health centers can only meet 27% of the demand for mental health services and just 6% of the demand for substance use disorder treatment.

In addition to the grant announcement, HRSA continues to prioritize the expansion of behavioral health services through various initiatives. Recent efforts include:

- Requiring mental health services in HRSA's initiative to expand school-based health centers.
- Funding partnerships between pediatricians and psychiatrists to offer mental health teleconsultations.
- Expanding primary care and psychiatric care teleconsultation programs to schools and emergency departments.
- Training thousands of new mental health providers, including psychologists and licensed clinical social workers.
- Building access points for opioid use disorder treatment in rural communities.
- Providing loan repayment for mental health providers in high-need areas.
- Launching the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline to support expectant and new mothers.

The HRSA also looks forward to future legislative support to expand mental health and substance use disorder services as part of a multiyear extension of community health center funding. These efforts are part of a broader, long-term strategy to ensure that essential behavioral health services are accessible to all Americans, particularly in underserved areas like the U.S. Virgin Islands.

