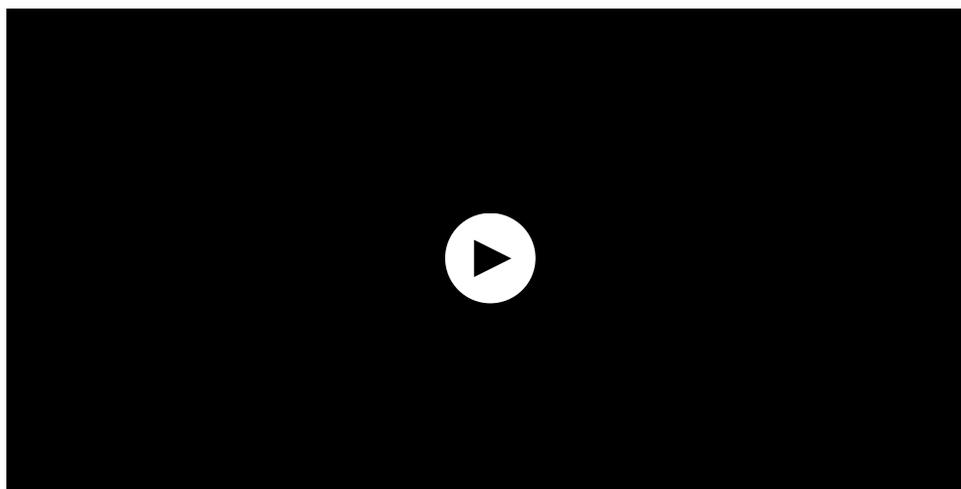


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# UA and ADMH announce \$8 million project to expand substance abuse and mental health care

BY JENNIFER EDWARDS | THURSDAY, JULY 21ST 2016



UA and ADMH announce \$8 million project to expand substance abuse and mental health care

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – In Alabama, access to mental health care is not always easy.

The Alabama Department of Public Health conducted a survey in 2015, people said mental health issues is at the top of the list of greatest health concerns in the state.

This could be changing for the better in West Alabama.

The University of Alabama School of Social Work and the Alabama Department of Mental Health are partnering on an \$8 million dollar project to expand substance abuse and mental health services to underserved communities in West Alabama.

The goal is to offer several services under one roof.

Medical professionals are pushing for integrated care across the United States, many in West Alabama will now be able to address physical and mental health concerns with their primary care doctor.

"The idea is to embed behavioral health care service providers, within primary care settings, what this means is when an Alabamian goes into the doctor's office for normal care, they will now be screened, assessed for substance use, co-occurring mental illnesses," said Dr. David Albright, associate professor of social work and principal investigator of the project.

Substance abuse and mental illness often go hand-in-hand, but that fact rarely is discussed. Doctors hope the program will eliminate the stigma surrounding these conditions.

"In many communities, in rural Alabama, anything to do with mental health issues is simply not talked about a great deal, so to be able to come to the doctor's office to be seen, screened, assessed and referred to the appropriate person or system would be helpful to breaking that gap that's between seeking treatment and not seeking treatment," said Dr. Gary Walton, Chief Medical Officer of Whatley Health Services Inc.

Not only do health professionals hope the program provides better treatment for this in need, it could also prevent further health related issues.

"As most things, alcohol dependency, drug dependency are major problems that interact with diabetes, hypertension, we'd like to make that one less problem by getting an early assessment," said Dr. Walton.

The services will be offered in Federally Qualified Health Centers as well as the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

The program is expected to help close to 90,000 Alabamians.

The program will begin in Tuscaloosa, referrals will begin being taken in October.

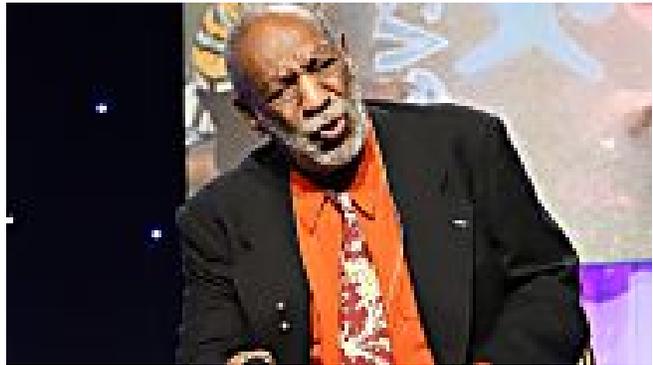
Dr. Albright said they expect to have the program implemented in several surrounding counties by year three.

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