



Care Connect: Year One Impact Report

Increasing Access to Mental Health Care: Our Impact, What We've Learned, and What Comes Next

June 1, 2025 – May 31, 2026

In June 2025, Mental Health America of Greater Houston launched Care Connect to make it easier for people to find and access behavioral health care through reliable information, technology, and personalized support. Since then, it has grown into a responsive resource that helps individuals and families across Greater Houston connect with services and supports that meet their needs.

This first year has given us a much better understanding of how people seek behavioral health care and where additional support is needed. In addition to people seeking help for themselves, many who contact Care Connect are looking for help for someone they love. They are parents trying to find mental health services for their child or teen, adults searching for support for their adult son or daughter, and people trying to help a husband, wife, or another loved one find care. Those conversations remind us that the person trying to help often needs support navigating the system, too. Whether someone is seeking care for themselves or helping someone they love, Care Connect provides a place to start, helps them understand their options, and supports them in finding the care that best meets their needs.

What Have We Built?

- **Online Provider Search:** A 24/7 searchable directory with 900 vetted behavioral health providers representing diverse backgrounds and over 30 languages. Individuals can search by location, insurance, service cost, language, specialty, religious beliefs, gender/gender identity, and other preferences.
- **Helpline:** Trained bilingual (English and Spanish) community resource specialists provide personalized support via phone, text, and email. They listen to what a person needs, help identify possible options, offer guidance on advocating for themselves or a loved one, and follow up when possible to learn whether the connection worked.
- **Pro Bono Counseling:** Care Connect provides up to six free counseling sessions for people who qualify. Counseling is provided through a growing network of licensed behavioral health professionals who volunteer their time, as well as supervised social work and counseling interns completing required clinical hours as part of their professional training. This model

expands access to free counseling while also helping prepare the next generation of behavioral health professionals.

Year One reinforced a simple but important distinction: Provider availability and true accessibility are not the same thing. A provider may appear to be an option on paper, but still be out of reach because of cost, wait time, special needs, location, scheduling, or other barriers.

What Did Care Connect Achieve in Year One?

Measure	Year One: June 2025-May 2026
Online provider search visits	13,344
Unique online users	2,991
Helpline contacts (Sept 2025-Dec 2025)	363
Active providers in directory	904
Confirmed pro bono providers	36
Pro bono clients served (Jan 2026-May 2026)	45
Free therapy sessions provided (Jan 2026-May 2026)	192

Who's In Our Provider Network?

- More than 300 organizations and 600 individual practitioners
- More than 200 providers offering one or more services for \$50 or less
- Approximately one third reside in Houston, one-third in the broader Greater Houston region and one-third elsewhere in Texas
- Providers representing more than 30 languages
- A range of provider types, backgrounds, specialties and service formats
- Those working toward licensure can search the provider network for professionals who offer supervision to help them complete their required clinical hours.

Who Is Turning to Us for Help?

Care Connect is reaching people across age, income, racial and ethnic groups, with a strong concentration among people with lower household incomes.

- 70% female and 30% male
- 35% Hispanic/Latino; 30% Black/African-American; 21% White; 7% Asian; 6% Bi/Multiracial; 1% Indigenous
- 72% ages 25–64; 12% ages 18–24; 12% ages 65+; 4% under 18
- 82% with household income below \$50,000; 15% between \$50,000 and \$99,999; 3% above \$100,000

How Are People Finding Us?

People are finding Care Connect in a variety of ways. The most commonly reported sources are Google, ChatGPT, various community partners, friends and family, and law enforcement.

People are actively searching for help on their own, which reinforces the importance of making Care Connect easy to find. At the same time, we know many people still don't know where to turn. Greater outreach will allow us to reach more people and make sure they know Care Connect is there when they need help.

What Are People Looking for?

Therapy and counseling are the most common needs, but people come to Care Connect looking for many different kinds of help. Some need an evaluation, medication management, substance use treatment, inpatient or residential care, or other community support. We've also learned that what someone asks for at first isn't always what they ultimately need. Sometimes it takes a conversation to figure that out.

How Is Free Counseling Expanding Access And Making An Impact?

Cost continues to be the biggest barrier to getting mental health care. Through Care Connect, people who qualify can receive up to six counseling sessions at no cost.

Since launching in January 2026, Care Connect has built what we believe is the largest free counseling network in Texas. Unlike programs that hire clinicians to provide free counseling, our network is built around behavioral health professionals who volunteer appointments they could otherwise use for paying clients. They are choosing to make room in their practices to provide free care to people who otherwise may not be able to afford it. In addition, supervised social work and counseling interns help us serve more people while completing required clinical hours.

The early results are encouraging. **Among clients surveyed in year one, 91% were satisfied with services, and 82% said counseling improved their mental health.**

What Have We Learned In Year One?

- **People may call for one thing, but need something else.** Someone may call asking for a therapist, but after talking with them, we may realize they need something different.
- **People reach out for help before they are ready to receive it.** They may not return a call or follow through right away, for a number of reasons including stigma, fear, and uncertainty about getting help.
- **Having insurance doesn't guarantee access.** Copays, transportation, and limited service hours are still barriers, even for people with insurance.
- **People cycle through many services before finding the right fit.** Sometimes people have already tried several therapists or services before they reach us.

- **People are often looking for help for someone they care about.** We hear from parents, spouses, family members, and friends who are trying to figure out where to turn.
- **People are in desperate need of connection.** We've had people reach out who are lonely and simply need someone to talk to and someone who will listen.

How Is Care Connect At The Center Of What We Do?

Care Connect has become the **unifying focus of our work** around the shared goal of helping people get the mental health support they need.

Veterans Behavioral Health: Our team uses Care Connect when veterans and their families need support beyond what we traditionally provide.

Workplace Wellness: Employers can share Care Connect with employees as an independent, trusted resource for finding mental health support. This allows employees to seek help privately and directly, which can be especially important when concerned about using an employer-sponsored resource.

Education and Training: We help people recognize mental health concerns, and Care Connect gives them a place to turn when they or someone they know needs care.

Public Policy and Advocacy: The barriers people encounter through Care Connect inform our advocacy, and our advocacy works to improve access to the care they need.

What Are We Seeing as Year Two Begins?

In year two, awareness is growing, more people are turning to Care Connect, and the pace of activity is increasing. In just the first three months of Year Two, helpline contacts exceeded the number received during the entire first year. The pro bono network also continued to grow, and more people received free counseling.

Measure	Year One: June 2025-May 2026	Year Two: 3 months June 2026-August 2026
Helpline contacts	363	369
Confirmed pro bono providers	36	50
Pro bono clients served	45	87
Free therapy sessions provided	192	223

How Will We Build Care Connect's Capacity to Grow?

- **Strengthen frontline capacity:** Add staff to meet growing demand.
- **Grow the provider network by 50% across Texas:** Continued success in meeting people's personal preferences.

- **Add peer and recovery support:** Integrate people with lived experience who can help individuals and families navigate care and recovery.
- **Keep our technology strong and up to date.** Keep Care Connect’s technology current and reliable, while improving how we collect and use data to better understand needs and gaps in care.
- **Broaden language access and outreach.** Expand translation capacity and outreach so more people know how to find Care Connect and can get help in the language they are most comfortable using.
- **Develop resources for parents and young people.** Create dedicated information and navigation support for parents to help them understand the process and what is available, and help young people talk to their parents about their mental health.

How Will We Help More People Access Care?

- **Double the pro bono provider network from 50 to 100.** This will allow us to provide free counseling to more people.
- **Extend free counseling sessions to insured people who cannot afford their out-of-pocket costs.** Having insurance doesn’t always mean someone can afford care.
- **Recruit psychiatrists and nurse practitioners to volunteer free appointments each month.** Affordable medication management remains difficult to find.
- **Build partnerships to help people afford medication.** The cost of medication can be another barrier to getting care.
- **Fund statewide outreach to reach both people seeking help and new providers.** More outreach will help people find Care Connect and help us continue growing the provider network.
- **Launch more intensive personal navigation for people with complex needs and families helping a loved one.** Some people need more hands-on and longer-term help to navigate the system and stay connected to care.

“What Has Care Connect Meant to Our Community?”

- *“Also I am in an extremely hard time right now, but I must express my gratitude for you. I have searched for months to find help for therapy that would be in my budget or on my insurance and have gotten no where [sic]...So I truly appreciate your help and dedication to following through. It means the world to me in a time that I feel I have no one on my side and no where [sic] to go.” ~K.J.*
- *“[The Community Resource Specialist] made me feel seen. Unjudged. Not a case number. Not a checklist. A person. She held that door open long enough for me to walk through. ... Life has not settled. I won’t pretend that it has. ... But every single week, I have a therapist who listens—who challenges me—who teaches me how to show up—fully—with my intelligence, my thoughtfulness, and my resilience leading the way.” ~M.B.*

- *“After years of difficulty finding the right support, this adolescent was finally connected with someone who provided consistent, compassionate, and appropriate care. The therapeutic relationship that followed has been life changing and has significantly supported the young person’s stability and wellbeing. This experience showed me how much of a difference the right connection at the right time can make.” ~T.S. (Referral Partner)*
- *“Open to a supervisor, this program allowed me to get the help I desperately needed when I was at my lowest in 28 years of life. I felt like I had nothing and nothing mattered after my little brother passed away last year. I thought I would never recover or find someone to allow myself the opportunity to open up to. Thru this program I've learned more in how to cope with my grief and heal. As well as how to be nicer to myself. My ocd symptoms have improved and my stress and depression are at their lowest ! I thank your team for everything they've done. Thank you for giving me my life back !! ❤️” ~ L.R.*

What’s Next for Care Connect?

Care Connect’s first year has shown us how much this work can mean, for the people who need care and for our community. Every person we help gives us a better understanding of what makes care accessible and what stands in the way. We have a responsibility to use what we learn to help our community live healthier.

In Year Two, we will strengthen our partnerships, expand access to affordable care, and follow more closely what happens after a referral. Are people getting appointments? Can they afford treatment? Can they continue receiving care? These answers matter. They will help us improve Care Connect and show providers, funders, and policymakers where their support and decisions can make the greatest difference.

Mental Health America of Greater Houston has a leading role to play in this work. We can bring people together, put what we are learning on the table, and work toward solutions to the barriers we see every day. Through Care Connect, we are helping people get care now and leading efforts to make access to care better across our community.

Want To Connect with Us?

Renae Vania Tomczak, President | CEO, renae@mhahouston.org

Andrea Usanga, Chief Strategy and Information Officer, ausanga@mhahouston.org

Sarah Barlament, Director of Development, sbarlament@mhahouston.org