

# Lee Turner – Covenant Health System

How is Covenant making a positive impact in the community with mental health?

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Our mission as a faith based not for profit health system. And really, that's about calling us to care for the whole person, body, mind and spirit. We like to place special emphasis on those in our community who are poor and vulnerable. And really, that's anyone who lacks resources in order to optimize their whole person health. Now, we've been here for more than a century with medical expertise. But we're more than that in terms of the provision of mental health services that we provide. We are a partner with Texas Tech Health Sciences Center. It's probably one of our most valued relationships as covenant serves as a teaching hospital. And we also are partners with a number of other institutions of higher education who together really working on developing expanded workforce expertise and mental and behavioral health and we make financial investments to programs and services in our community and collaboration with other agencies. Most of them are not for profits. And finally, I think importantly, we are a community leader. So we have a responsibility to advocate for the health and well-being of our neighbors.

What is Covenant's role in this initiative?

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Well, I really think it's multifaceted we're one of the founding partners of the West Texas mental health collaborative. And as part of that, we're determined to improve the status quo for mental health and a community. We have fought for a long time, under the perception that there are not enough services that they're not affordable and the number of persons needing help with behavioral health, mental health issues far outstrip the number of professionals who are available to help them and services. So we want to say, That's not good enough anymore. It's time to move forward. We want to really address the mental health gaps and services that have been determined by the Meadows Institute study. And we want to find ways that we can use the expertise we have, but also learn from others. I think that really is the spirit of a collaborative relationship is how do you work together, share best practices and improve together. We're going to continue to use our own resources to expand services and programs and then fund community not for profits who share our vision.

Are there any project Covenant is currently working on related to the mental health initiative?

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Very exciting project that we have underway in the planning phase under our master facility plan is a expansion of our children's hospital covenant Children's Hospital. And we're calling it center for relational health. You know, so many of the challenges that we find today around care for persons who are suffering anything from depression, to full blown identified mental health concerns is with stigma. People are not wanting to get help, because they're somehow or another embarrassed by that and they think somebody will think less of them because of that. And so we are using this term relational health because the literature shows that really is a focus in pediatric care how to teach children to have good relationships, how to be socially and emotionally aware and competent. And so the Center for Relational Health at Covenant Children's Hospital will be a partnership with Texas Tech Health Sciences. And we're really excited about what that will mean for the children of the South Plains. And we plan to kick off construction for that remodel in 2021.

## Why is collaboration important in addressing mental health?

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Well, we were really inspired to come together initially because we thought as a collaborative, we'd be able to pull our resources and do what no single entity and a collaboration is able to do alone. So there's strength in numbers. And we were also inspired by the Meadows Institute study that recognized the many strengths that we have as community partners, and they identified a number of wonderful collaborative examples but they encouraged us to go deeper and be broader. And so I really think that is the great opportunity here before us, how are we better together to meet the challenges and the needs of the community for mental and behavioral health issues? We've listened to a lot of voices from the community. And I would say that we have not presumed to have heard them all. We need to do more listening. And we need to focus and bring more people to the table in order to really understand the needs of our community and respond appropriately. But I think we have the beginnings of a roadmap for implementation. And so now is really the time for the serious work to begin.

## What are you most looking forward to with this initiative?

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I think my other comment about the West Texas Mental Health Collaborative is we are creating what I like to term a vessel of trust? If you look at the membership and you think, Well, you know, how is the city or the county involved in behavioral health? In what way could UMC and Covenant Health collaborate? And what is the role for StarCare? Is the mental health mental retardation state agency lead for the area? How do we all work together? I think that is the interesting question and the opportunity to take all of the amazing talent, all the creative people that work in these various entities and agencies, and put them to task to solve the issues that we have in terms of mental and behavioral health in our community.