

Background on Common Ground & Rationale for Request

As Michigan's largest nonprofit organization exclusively devoted to crisis intervention, Common Ground has been a prominent figure in mental health care since its establishment in 1971. Operating as a 24-hour crisis services agency, they are committed to aiding individuals and families facing crises through a comprehensive continuum of care, serving 165,000 people annually.

Studies currently show that 40-60% of those in need of behavioral health support do not, or cannot, access it. Additionally, individuals aged 12 and above who don't need emergency intervention, but still require immediate support to prevent worsening symptoms, are often left without appropriate care and treatment, as are individuals who have suffered from mass violence events, such as those that we have unfortunately witnessed first-hand in Oxford and MSU in our own state.

These incidents have revealed a significant gap in mental health services.

To address this gap, Common Ground seeks to expand the number of clinicians and capacity of their virtual Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC) to seven (7) days a week. Without this service, these individuals may face barriers leading to symptom escalation, and be forced into costly, restrictive, or ineffective alternatives. Increasing available mental health care resources is essential to the safety and wellbeing of children, individuals, and families. BHUC is a virtual support platform available day and evening with no appointment necessary that provides easy, low/no cost access to care within 30 minutes, currently serving 2200 annually. It removes several significant barriers to access and ensures residents will receive support to meet their needs. It is an efficient, highly replicable, multi-sector integrated service that addresses this need while providing hope for individuals and families across Michigan.

Additionally, Common Ground's clinicians are specifically trained in mass violence response, which allows clinicians to address the "ripple effect" of trauma that occurs in the surrounding community following such a mass violence event. Importantly, BHUC allows clinicians to stay in contact with individuals affected throughout the State of Michigan, eliminating the geographic confines of care. For example, in the wake of the tragedy at Michigan State University, students traveled from campus to all corners of the State and beyond but were still able to receive a level of crisis care virtually with BHUC.

Studies also show record levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents. In 2020, suicide was the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-17 across the U.S. In 2021, 22% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide. It is imperative this vulnerable population have a comfortable and familiar medium through which to seek help when in crisis.

Unmanaged or poorly managed mental health issues factor in over half of child abuse and neglect cases in Michigan; these numbers skyrocket when substance abuse is included. In situations when parents are able to recognize when their symptoms worsen, they may face long waits to see a counselor, inflexible schedules at their psychiatrist, or difficulty attending in-person appointments due to work and school schedules. Should symptoms worsen to crisis, they

may fear seeking help; a stay in a psychiatric ward could mean potential child protective service involvement, gaps in school or work (cascading to potential loss of employment and housing), and/or losing custody or care of their children. Juxtapose demand with the existing shortage of mental health staff in Michigan, and you get lengthy waits to see primary providers and to get refills of psychotropic drugs. This translates to unnecessary emergency room visits or worse.

Common Ground is uniquely situated to identify and respond to the aforementioned needs in an efficient manner. The strategy employed by BHUC is to connect with the target population through referrals from area providers, as well as crisis response lines, to provide care when and where it is needed. The target population is people 12 and up throughout the state of Michigan. BHUC is ideal for people experiencing mental health issues who face delays in visits with their primary provider and, without prompt intervention, are likely to experience more severe psychiatric symptoms. The typical patient is seeking quick, easily accessible, discreet, stigma-free intervention and support for depression, anxiety, panic attacks, disturbing thoughts, acute grief reactions, trouble managing daily activities, and co-occurring substance use disorders. Increasing available mental health care resources is essential to the safety and wellbeing of children, individuals, and families.

This funding request will support the expansion of clinicians from our current two (2) to six (6) and help expand the program to seven (7) days a week of state-wide coverage for the next two years, with the goal of BHUC being self-sustaining through earned insurance revenue thereafter.