

W/B HIDTA Treatment and Prevention Spotlight

The Behavioral Health
Leadership Institute (BHLI)



The Behavioral Health Leadership Institute (BHLI) mission is to reach the most vulnerable, un-served populations in Baltimore who suffer from opioid use disorder (OUD) and provide the highest quality services while delivering low-barrier treatment. BHLI services are intentionally designed to serve those with the greatest need who are often excluded from other traditional service models, including those with a history of incarceration and re-entering the community, those experiencing homelessness, those without insurance, and those without a government-issued ID. Their flagship Project Connections at Re-Entry (PCARE) mobile clinic is stationed daily outside Baltimore Central Booking, meeting individuals the moment they re-enter the community and connecting them to treatment within minutes. BHLI aims to fill gaps in services for vulnerable populations experiencing addiction and mental health issues. Contact is initiated in jail when an individual enters the system, which helps with transition to PCARE's treatment program upon release. A limited availability of treatment services and issues around assisting individuals newly released with referrals to treatment creates an extremely high risk of opioid overdose following release from incarceration. This reality highlights the critical need for the program's services. Funding from the Washington-Baltimore HIDTA expanded the PCARE van hours and staffing to provide services to individuals, including those newly released from jail.

Rooted in a low-threshold approach, the program removes unnecessary barriers—welcoming anyone who expresses a desire to begin treatment. Easy access is prioritized during this critical period, such as release from incarceration. Policies that limit engagement and participation are removed. Patients are not required to attend a certain number of meetings or penalized for missed appointments. Many who have been turned away from programs are receptive to BHLI's welcoming approach, where there are really no barriers to treatment participation. Lack of insurance, identification, or transportation is never a barrier. This open-door model allows individuals who might otherwise go without care to engage in treatment on their own terms. The determination to participate in treatment is so strong that it is not an unusual sight to see individuals who were released overnight sitting outside of the van, waiting for it to open.

This flexibility is echoed directly by the staff. "There really is no barrier to treatment, so hopefully that change in your life will snowball into other changes in your life," the Operations Director at BHLI, Ayanna Fewes, MBA, PMP, stated.

BHLI prides itself on bringing together highly qualified and deeply compassionate professionals to serve some of the city's most vulnerable populations. The organization operates with the belief that those with the greatest needs deserve care from the most skilled and dedicated providers. Many of BHLI's nurses and clinicians have joined the team through word of mouth, creating a strong pipeline of mission-driven professionals committed to making a meaningful impact. The program is seen as a community resource and referrals keep growing. "We serve a vulnerable population with the highest quality care. We often get a feeling from patients that they never want to leave. We are giving people positive steps in the direction of a life they wouldn't be able to get otherwise," Deborah Agus, JD, the Executive Director at BHLI highlighted.



The program is always expanding, including increasing capacity through adding shifts, extending hours, and opening additional sites. For a relatively small program, it has had a huge impact on Baltimore City. Since PCARE's inception almost seven years ago, around 55,000 clinical assessments have been conducted. Washington-Baltimore HIDTA funding has made expansion possible to continue meeting the needs of the community. Staff are always talking about how to further support patients beyond just treatment and continue to strengthen their partnership with the jail.