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## Iowa to End Mental Health Program, Start New Clinics

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Iowa health officials are phasing out a long-standing care coordination program for residents with serious mental health conditions, raising concerns among families and providers about the future of support services.

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS) has announced it will begin winding down the Integrated Health Home (IHH) program, a Medicaid-funded initiative

that connects individuals with serious mental illnesses and children with severe emotional disturbances to coordinated care starting this month. The state plans to fully transition adults out of the program by the end of September and children by the end of December, with a complete shutdown by January 2026.

Replacing the program is the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), which will serve a wider range of Iowans regardless of diagnosis or insurance status. State officials say the CCBHCs will offer a broader array of behavioral health and substance abuse services and are part of a larger overhaul of the state's mental health delivery system.

Unlike the IHH model, which focused narrowly on Medicaid recipients with qualifying diagnoses, the new clinic-based approach aims to centralize services under one roof. According to Iowa HHS spokesperson Alex Murphy, "CCBHCs serve anyone who walks through their doors... and provide a broad range of behavioral health services."

Still, the state's timeline and lack of clarity have drawn concern. Providers say the move came suddenly and without adequate time to ensure patients and families are prepared for the transition. Billie Butler, Chief Executive Officer of Zion Integrated Behavioral Health Services, said her organization must move roughly 175 clients to new case managers under a compressed schedule. "There's a very short amount of time to make sure that people can meet a new person and make sure that the services continue," Butler said. "These are vital services for some of the most vulnerable people in the state."

Anne Starr, Chief Executive Officer of Orchard Place in Des Moines, echoed similar concerns. She said she had participated in conversations about the IHH program's future but was led to believe the phase-out would occur in 2026, not within months. "We were all shocked... Why now? What's happening?" Starr said. She added that her staff is unsure how to advise the 350 families currently enrolled.

The state insists that issues with the IHH program have been discussed for over a year and were part of a settlement agreement reached in January, following a class-action lawsuit on behalf of children with severe emotional disturbances. That legal agreement, officials say, included evaluations of the program and development of new care models.

While the state claims the change will improve outcomes, families are left with unanswered questions. Paula Davis, whose 44-year-old son Jeffrey lives with bipolar disorder and autism, said she's deeply worried about losing the consistency and trust built with their

longtime care coordinator. “He knows Jeffrey inside and out,” Davis said. “To me, that’s just ludicrous, because Jeffrey could go backwards instead of forwards because of this move.”

As with many government overhauls, the promised efficiency is being met with skepticism. While Iowa HHS says it will work with providers to manage the transition, families and front-line workers are bracing for disruptions and hoping the new system won’t leave the state’s most vulnerable behind.