

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)



An innovative model of care delivery results in better outcomes, significant savings for Salt Lake County

For some people who struggle with severe mental health or substance use disorders, traditional treatment methods aren't always effective. With the high cost of inpatient mental health care — \$15.3 billion in 2016¹ — and higher readmission rates compared to patients receiving non-mental-health care,² many communities are struggling to strike a balance in providing quality care for those in need with the day-to-day realities of limited funding. And when that balance isn't met, people may find themselves cycling in and out of the health system or worse, incarcerated. There are now 10 times more people with serious mental illness in state prisons and county jails than there are in state mental hospitals.³

ACT: Big-picture support on a personal scale

ACT is a national, evidenced-based service delivery model with a primary goal of recovery through community treatment and habilitation. For consumers with the most challenging and persistent problems, ACT assumes primary responsibility for all services — from psychiatry and social work to rehabilitation and substance-abuse treatment. Rather than referring members to multiple programs and services, the ACT program takes a team approach to provide the treatment and services that members need.⁴

Implementing ACT in Salt Lake County

In 2011, Utah's Salt Lake County contracted with Optum® to provide behavioral health services to its residents. While an extensive array of programs and services were created or refined, Optum continued to utilize data analytics to assess outcomes. Over time, the data revealed that some members with persistent health or substance use problems — and a high rate of system utilization — continued to fall through the cracks. With the approval of the county, we decided to set up an ACT model of care delivery in 2014. We quickly identified Volunteers of America (VOA) as an ideal partner, because the VOA was already serving the county's homeless population and had a team of professionals already in place who were well suited for the needs of an ACT program.

Seeing results, changing lives

In just two years, the ACT program has made a dramatic difference in the lives of its members. As Tim Whalen, Director of Behavioral Health Services for Salt Lake County reflects, "An ACT team is considered kind of the gold standard of community care for folks suffering with serious mental health issues. We supported that and we worked with [Optum] and with the provider they selected to really help them implement that here in Salt Lake County. We believe we're having fantastic outcomes as a result."

Brandy's story

When Brandy entered the ACT program, she was homeless, jobless, battling with substance use and had no support system. Her schizophrenia was unmanaged and she was feeling suicidal. The ACT team came in and immediately paired Brandy with a therapist to support her throughout her recovery on a day-to-day basis, securing the resources and attention she needed. Today, Brandy doesn't struggle with substance use, she has an apartment, and because she's on the right medication at the right dosage, her psychotic episodes have decreased. When asked where she'd be had it not been for the ACT program, Brandy responded, "Not to be so crude, but dead. I just wasn't getting the help I needed, I wasn't getting the attention I needed, and when I was, it was bad attention." She believes that this program has given her hope and opened new opportunities for a healthier, happier future.

ACT provides support for:

- Activities of daily living
- Managing finances
- Housing
- Health care
- Family life
- Medications
- Employment
- Integrated treatment

A unique set of principles sets ACT apart from traditional care-delivery methods:

- An ACT team has a shared caseload, which provides a fixed point of responsibility and gives members the ability to know and feel comfortable with everyone on the team.
- An ACT team has a small caseload, which allows them to offer greater attention and work more closely with members to develop plans to help reach their goals.
- An ACT program can be incorporated into a community's existing behavioral health services.
- ACT has no pre-set limit on how long consumers receive services.
- As a flexible service delivery model, ACT provides help wherever and whenever it is needed — not just a few times a month but as often as necessary.
- Crisis management is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.⁵

A hospital without walls

An ACT team serves members whenever they need support, wherever their problems arise — at home, on the street, in the hospital or even in jail.

Since implementing the ACT model of care delivery, Salt Lake County has experienced significant savings in both inpatient and total health care costs.⁶

	Total costs for ACT members in the 12 months before implementation	Total costs for ACT members in the 12 months after implementation	Percent change
 INPATIENT CARE	\$7,386,199.84	\$2,454,119.30	-67%
 OVERALL HEALTH CARE SPEND	\$9,042,828.50	\$3,657,190.10	-60%

Making the most of Medicaid funding

The ACT program in Salt Lake County represents our long-term commitment to the community and long-term investment in its future. At Optum, we know that already-limited Medicaid dollars need to be spent as productively as possible. That’s why we reinvest any unused funds back into the program, helping Salt Lake County continue to improve and fine-tune its services. One of the latest enhancements is the implementation of a new bundled services reimbursement model to help enhance service coordination and cost-efficiency.

“I think Optum approaches working with a county, or any government entity ... they view it as a partnership. They understand that there are elected individuals in our county who set policy and are responsible for the oversight of these scarce tax dollars to provide these safety net services. They’re going to work with us, and make sure we have evidence-based programs that are doing great work for our citizens.”

— **Tim Whalen**, Director of Behavioral Health Services for Salt Lake County

Contact us

To learn how Optum can help you improve your behavioral health services for Medicaid recipients, visit [optum.com/BH4Medicaid](https://www.optum.com/BH4Medicaid) or contact us at **1-866-223-4603**; email outcomes@optum.com.

1. Owens PL, Finger KR, McDermott KW, Muhuri PK, Heslin KC. Inpatient Stays Involving Mental and Substance Use Disorders, 2016. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. <https://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb249-Mental-Substance-Use-Disorder-Hospital-Stays-2016.pdf>. Published March 2019.
2. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Hospital Readmissions for Psychiatric Conditions. <http://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/research/data/data-infographics/images/psychiatric-hospital-readmissions.html>.
3. Insel T. Director's Blog: A Misfortune Not a Crime. National Institute of Mental Health. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/director/2014/a-misfortune-not-a-crime.shtml>. Published April 2014.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services. Assertive Community Treatment: An Evidence-based Practice.
5. Ibid.
6. Results from an Optum-conducted July 2019 evaluation of services provided to consumers in the Salt Lake County ACT program. We reviewed the 12 months prior to and after each consumer's first ACT service and calculated total amounts for inpatient, outpatient and residential services, as well as per-member-per-month costs, to establish the change in the approved amount for each service level.



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