

# UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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## OUR PATH TO EMPATH

A visionary concept becomes the model for innovative care delivery



- 2019 – Concept presented to address behavioral health needs of patients
  - Over the next five years “concept becomes a reality”



- How? Partnerships (Advancing Kentucky Together)
  - State officials
  - Community mental health providers – New Vista
  - City officials
  - University colleagues
  - National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)



- Result: **Right Care – Right Time – Right Place**

## INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH

### The behavioral health crisis

- One in five adults have a mental health need
- One in seven emergency visits are a behavioral emergency
- Length of stay for an average behavioral health (BH) emergency visit is greater than 30 hours (three times the average)
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in ages 18-34
- “Crisis stabilization” serves *mild* BH crisis, exclusion criteria
- Inpatient capacity challenges
- Safety concerns
- Emergency department environment
- Assessment versus treatment

## EMPATH

# What is EmPATH



EMERGENCY



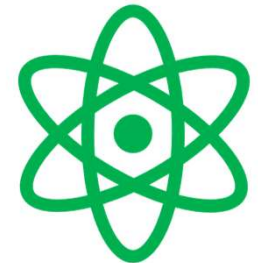
PSYCHIATRIC



ASSESSMENT



TREATMENT



HEALING

## INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH

# How are EmPATH units different from traditional emergency departments

### EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

- Treated as a medical condition with a behavioral health/psych consult
- **Assessment** and then find the “right place”
- Individual bay, hallway — **isolation**
- **Hectic**, anxiety provoking environment, sitters
- 72-hour hold for all behavioral health patients/restraints common



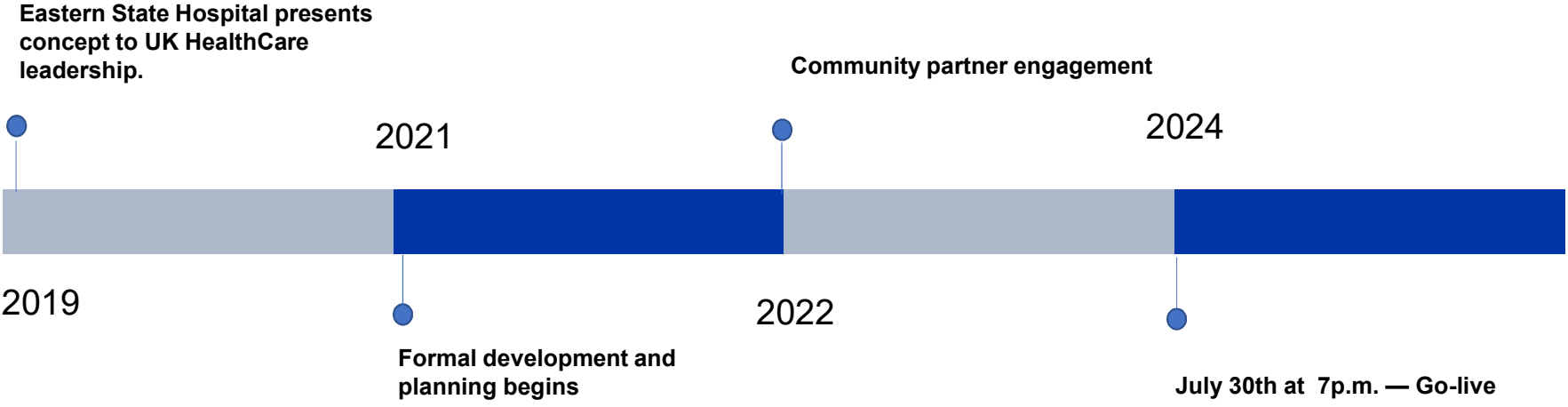
### EMPATH

- Behavioral health provider sees patient first
- **Treatment**
- Recliner in an open space — **Connection**
- **Calm** therapeutic environment
- No sitters, few restraints or holds — no coercion



**UK HEALTHCARE EMPATH JOURNEY**

# Innovation in Behavioral Health



## INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH

# EmPATH at UK HealthCare

- Patient-defined crisis
  - Able to manage complex conditions, including co-occurring substance use, mental health intellectual disability and dementia
- Psychiatry ownership
  - Behavioral health is the primary provider, consults other medical specialties as needed — culture shift
- Separate from the emergency department
  - Located five miles away from the system emergency department at Eastern State Hospital — takes direct admission from the community
- Community engagement
  - Weekly meetings with community partners — engaged in daily huddles
- Low barrier to care
  - Serves voluntary and involuntary patients with transportation to return home
- 16 chairs
  - No diversion, viewed as a specialty service — serving adults 18 and over

# UK EMPATH — A MODEL OTHERS ARE SEEKING TO REPLICATE

## NATIONAL IMPACT



UK EMPATH has helped influence behavioral health transformation from Alaska to South Carolina



## TRUSTED ADVISOR

By major academic, government and advocacy leaders\*



75 +

## EXECUTIVE TOURS

Healthcare leaders traveled from across the U.S. and internationally to Lexington to learn from the UK HealthCare EMPATH model



65 +

Organizations have sought UK HealthCare's expertise through consultations and strategic planning

\*Organizations seeking UK HealthCare's expertise include the Canadian Ministry of Health, Emory University, UCLA, Vanderbilt, Marshall University, NAMI Michigan, the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health, AAMC and the University of South Carolina.

## INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH

# EmPATH at UK HealthCare — Outcomes

9,620 patients \*

16.5 hours

60% related to suicide

46% female

Average age: 38

Less than .1% safety incidents

0 sitters used

Outpatient follow-up

29% Pre-EmPATH

65% Post-EmPATH



76% stabilized — return to outpatient services



95% diversion from state hospital

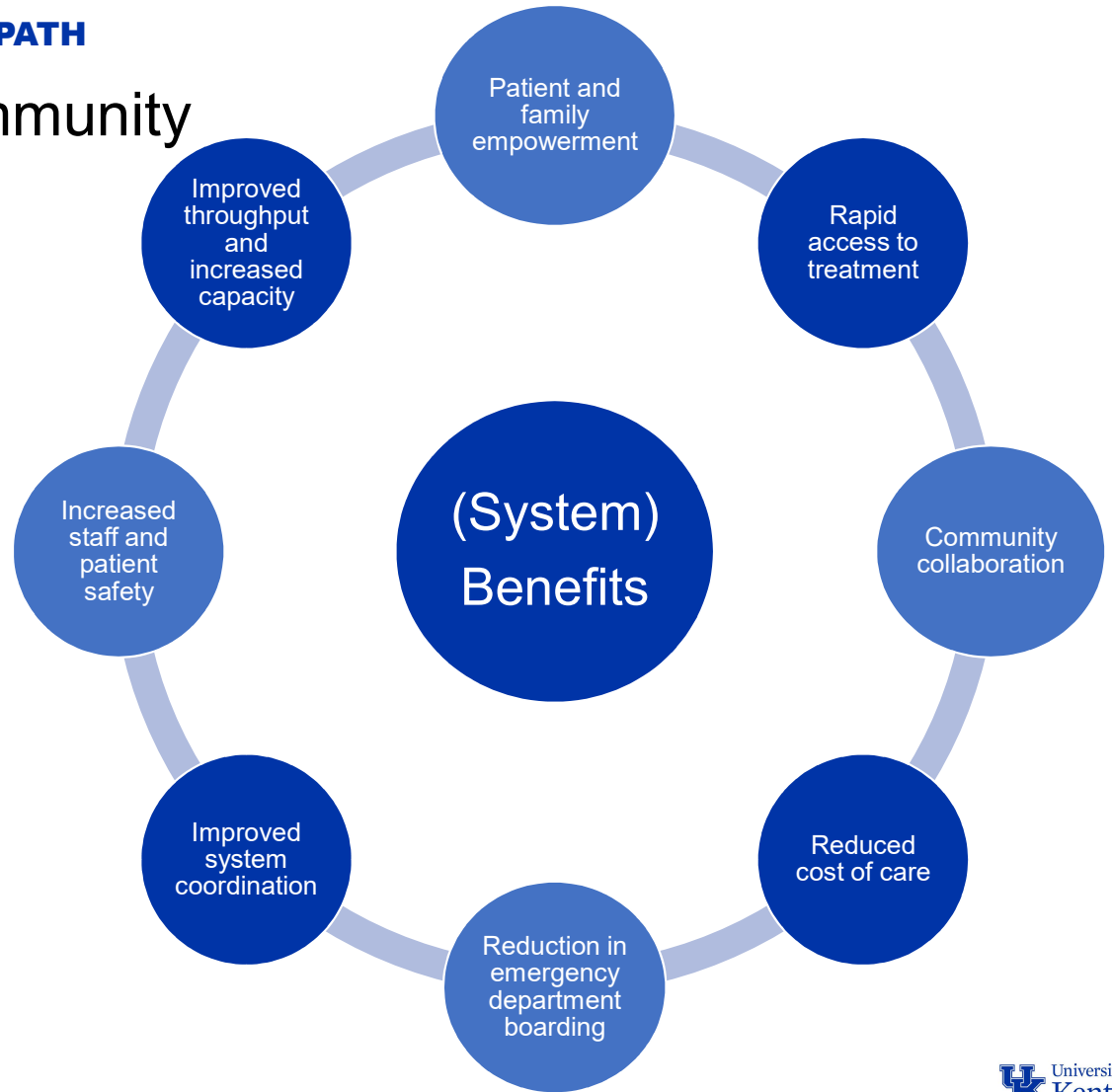


8% reduction in hospital census

\*As of June 1, 2026.

**INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH**

**Benefits — System and Community**



## INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH

### Awards and Honors

- 2024 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Pioneer Award
- 2025 EmPATH National Team of the Year
- 2026 Gage Award
- 2026 Rural Health Transformation



**INNOVATION IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: EMPATH**

# EmPATH Team Recognition



# QUESTIONS



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