

WHITE PAPER

# Lessons From Delaware: Best Practices for Coordinating Behavioral Healthcare

*Creating Wins in Enhanced Service Delivery*



# Creating Wins in Enhanced Service Delivery



Without proper technology integration, patient care in behavioral health becomes fragmented and uncoordinated. Ad hoc and traditional provider networks often face an uphill battle in determining how to best provide care.

One state moving quickly to remedy these issues is Delaware.

Like most states, Delaware faced significant challenges with referral management across both state agencies and behavioral health community providers. Providers often relied on resources they were familiar with, unaware of the broader network of behavioral health and community services available across the state. When connecting clients to organizations and services, the process was slow, requiring multiple phone calls or faxes waiting for a referral to be accepted.

This lack of insight into available resources and referral status created serious gaps in continuity of care. In a state with the nation's second-highest overdose rate, those gaps carried especially high stakes.

To work through the problem, Delaware's Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH) partnered with health technology company Bamboo Health to ensure patient care is more accessible and coordinated.

## In this white paper, you will learn:



Best practices for developing and implementing a behavioral health strategy



Technology's role in improving behavioral health outcomes



How to get user buy-in when integrating new technology



Tips for funding a technology platform and integration project

## When Delaware Met Bamboo

### Inside the game-changing partnership



Although Delaware is small in population size, its mix of urban, suburban and rural communities presents a diverse set of behavioral health challenges. The state also sits at a geographic junction drawing a highly transitory population influenced by neighboring states and major metropolitan areas.

This combination of scale, diversity and mobility makes Delaware an important testing ground for implementing whole-person healthcare models that other states can learn from. In 2018, the state launched the Delaware Treatment and Referral Network (DTRN) and partnered with Bamboo Health to deploy multiple behavioral health solutions to improve access to care and improve outcomes.

“Delaware struggled with limited technology adoption in behavioral health,” says Lisa Johnson, Principal of HEALTHe Insights, a leading healthcare consulting firm that worked with the state to design the strategy. “Providers relied on personal networks and paper-based systems. Our focus was to build the foundation for a statewide model that expanded visibility and improved coordination.”

Leveraging Bamboo’s OpenBeds® solution — which provides real-time patient matching for available treatment resources — DSAMH and Bamboo Health first collaborated on an electronic referral tool rebranded as DTRN eReferral. This system replaced phone and fax processes, provided transparency into referral status and streamlined communication between organizations. By automating what had previously been a slow and uncertain process, the tool significantly improved the timelines of access to care and established the foundation for broader coordination.



### Grappling with Delaware’s overdose death rate

Delaware’s drug overdose mortality rate is annually one of the nation’s worst.

In 2023, the last year with public information from the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Delaware had the third highest drug overdose mortality rate in the country, including Washington, D.C., at 53 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, and trailed only West Virginia among states.

From 2016-2023, the only states in the top 10 for drug overdose mortality rates in every year were West Virginia, Delaware and Kentucky. Since COVID, Delaware’s annual average drug overdose mortality rate is one of the highest in the nation at 54.1.

*BHB analysis of [annual CDC data](#)*

Building on the success of this project, the state expanded the vision beyond referrals. Additional functionality was developed to support real-time information sharing and coordinated management of shared clients across the system of care. This progression from a referral solution to a comprehensive coordination platform gave providers visibility into the full care journey and revealed new opportunities for collaboration.



## Bamboo Intelligence Hub

A BAMBOO HEALTH SOLUTION

The result is DTRN360, powered by the Bamboo Intelligence Hub™, an integrated care coordination platform for behavioral health. DTRN360 makes it easier for providers to connect individuals with resources, follow patients on their journey and support better outcomes. By giving behavioral health providers a holistic view of their patients’ interactions within Delaware’s system of care, the platform strengthens decision-making, streamlines coordination and enables care teams to adjust services according to each individual’s needs.

DTRN360 started by tracking current DSAMH clients to identify where they were on their care journey. DSAMH utilized existing client rosters to establish for whom they would receive “pings,” or real-time patient alerts. This allowed clinicians to have more information on each person served, including outside provider visits, medication and hospital encounters.

“The absence of visibility into partner activities made coordination difficult,” Johnson says. “By automating referral processes and adopting shared tools that enabled transparency across organizations, Delaware began building the infrastructure for true care coordination rather than relying on fragmented, paper-based systems.”

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**Lisa Johnson**  
Principal of HEALTHe Insights

# How DSAMH and Bamboo Health Combat Behavioral Health Challenges



Though the behavioral health industry is rapidly maturing, the sector still faces a number of growing pains.

The challenge is so critical that in [2022, Medicare Payment Advisory Commission \(MedPAC\) directed multiple government agencies](#), including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), to develop joint guidance on how states can promote behavioral health information technology adoption and interoperability.

DTRN360 is a statewide care coordination network designed to help with the transition of care for behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder). Bamboo Health, the leader in Real-Time Care Intelligence™, connects the dots between physical and behavioral health services during pivotal moments of care, such as emergency department arrivals, pharmacy dispensations, justice-involved events and transitions in care.

The partnership between DSAMH and Bamboo Health has delivered a host of benefits.. **Four major ones are:**

- **Reduced financial constraints.** Limited funding and the absence of financial incentives make long-term investments in health information technology (HIT) challenging.
- **Reduced technical challenges.** Many providers lack experience with electronic health records (EHRs) and have limited access to technical training.
- **Enhanced HIT functionality.** Existing HIT solutions often do not meet the specific needs of behavioral health settings.
- **Reduced workforce constraints.** Providers' increasing workloads can make it difficult to track large caseloads and maintain timely follow-up.

# The DTRN360/Bamboo Intelligence Hub

## Inside the numbers



Delaware and many other states face significant gaps in existing systems, causing delays in referrals, lack of follow-up visits and care fragmentation. These pitfalls make it hard for providers to communicate and get patients the care they need.

DSAMH's work with Bamboo started with an electronic referral platform. At the time, many Delaware behavioral health providers lacked electronic health records. For some, this was their first exposure to an integrated technology system beyond basic billing software. The absence of a prior infrastructure meant adoption required not only training but also a fundamental shift from paper-based workflows to digital coordination.

"Providers were a little bit fearful and slow to start because technology wasn't something that they worked on in the environment," says Michelle Singletary-Twyman, Division Director of Operations at DSAMH, and executive sponsor for DTRN360/Bamboo Intelligence Hub.

"Once they caught on, the need to fill that gap was apparent, and that adoption just ticked up quickly. We're already approaching 250,000 referrals," she says. "You give someone a little taste of what it could be, and we realized at that point that they started to ask for more support or different help."

For clinicians, implementing the tool was transformative. Prior to implementation, clinicians often struggled to understand the patient's journey. The provider had to piece together information that was often sent by fax or individual clinician written notes and could take a day to receive.

### Demonstrated Outcomes

**200,000+**

behavioral health referrals since 2018

**70%**

percentage that Delaware closes the loop on referrals

**98%**

improvement in referral response time for one psych hospital in Delaware

**80%**

of follow-up referral appointments kept

**180+**

referring and receiving entities in the state participate in the DTRN referral platform

Bamboo assisted in addressing this issue by enabling real-time information sharing and electronic referrals for clinical referrals and interoperability with referrals for social determinants of health.

“We will go from a paper-pencil faxing system to information at your fingertips,” Singletary-Twyman says. “Those were the big challenges that I saw: making sure that the next provider has the information about what’s going on with a client so that they are getting a true picture.”

“Delaware has done some fantastic things with the training, the deployment and the implementation of the referral network among their behavioral health providers,” says Brad Bauer, SVP, Business Development, at Bamboo Health. “They’re breaking down silos, providing the actual care and the tools that are needed to bridge those gaps.”

The DSAMH/Bamboo partnership is committed to solving challenges together. One example is around care teams. Knowing who else is treating an individual is critical for coordination, yet this information is often fragmented across different organizations and systems.

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SVP, Business Development  
Bamboo Health

DSAMH and Bamboo are collaborating to design functionality within DTRN360 that will identify, track and display care team members directly in the client record. This will allow providers to engage with other providers who are involved in a client’s care and engage those partners in real time.

This type of ongoing innovation illustrates the depth of the partnership. The platform is not static, but continually shaped by shared priorities to advance care coordination and improve client outcomes.

“Securing ongoing Medicaid participation will be important because it covers such a large share of DTRN clients,” Singletary-Twyman says. “At the same time, the initiative depends on piecing together multiple funding streams so that no single population or program is left behind.”

# Learning from Delaware: 7 Best Practices



Implementing a new system isn't as easy as just flipping a switch. It takes time, along with stakeholder involvement. Here are seven best practices the state of Delaware has gleaned in its work — ones that other states, counties and providers should adopt when implementing a new care coordination system.

## 1. Push past the status quo

Care providers are often risk-averse. Considering the stakes, that makes complete sense. But in behavioral health, waiting for change to occur is not an option. States and local governments must be willing to move forward even when the path is uncharted; they can do that with good partnerships, thoughtfulness and inclusive planning.

“This has never really been done before, so a partner cannot be so risk-averse that we're paralyzed by the standards and the restrictions that go along with the standards,” Singletary-Twyman says.

## 2. Create an ambassador program

States and counties entering these partnerships may have challenges with how to bring all stakeholders together. Providers are excited, even though many still have not embedded the technology into their daily workflows.

Bringing clinicians and other end users into the implementation process early is critical, helping leadership support their workforce and pinpoint gaps in knowledge. One of the ways to do both is to mobilize early adopters as part of an ambassador program. That is what DSAMH did. The results followed.

“I think it has taken the early adopters to the next level,” Singletary-Twyman says. “They've given us feedback since they began the process that has generated new questions for us.”



## 7 Best Practices from Delaware

1. Push past the status quo
2. Create an ambassador program
3. Deliver on-the-ground resources
4. Build a data-sharing environment
5. Build a data-protecting environment
6. Choose your partners carefully
7. Involve IT early



## The Funding Question

Implementing a new care coordination system requires significant and sustained investment. DSAMH has used a variety of funding sources to enable the project, including block grants and State Opioid Response funding, rather than state appropriations, according to Singletary-Twyamn.

This approach has allowed the initiative to move forward. It also highlights the importance of aligning multiple funding streams to ensure long-term stability.

Future funding sources include Medicaid, Advanced Planning Documents (APDs) and targeted federal programs such as Behavioral Health Technology Grants (BHIT). Medicaid represents one of the largest groups served through DTRN, but is not the only population supported. Because of that, states must continually identify new sources of funding.

## 3. Deliver on-the-ground resources

Implementing a new system requires more than technology. It requires an investment in dedicated resources to ensure success. It's essential to have a trusted lead who understands both the strategy and the day-to-day realities of provider adoption to anticipate barriers, adapt workflows and provide technical assistance or the ongoing support of the program.

"The process can be very difficult," Johnson says. "People sometimes think they will get the tool and it will roll itself out, or they'll lean very hard on the vendor. In reality, organizations need experienced leadership to bridge strategy, operations and technology. That's the only way initiatives like this succeed.

## 4. Build a data-sharing environment

In order for information to be shared, stakeholders must have similar sharing abilities. That's not always the case.

"This landscape can be a bit fragmented, meaning some stakeholders have EHRs while others don't," Bauer says. "How do you bring forward a consistent standard and powerful solution from a technology standpoint? That's the challenge."

With an interconnected data-sharing environment and support from third-party technology vendors, stakeholders can better align processes and work towards desired outcomes, including better care coordination, reduction of workforce burnout and administrative burdens, while improving individual outcomes.

## 5. Build a data-protecting environment

To create the success metrics and access the information they need, providers must be able to coordinate their data. Yet data sharing brings risk. Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations, or “42 CFR,” regulates healthcare data confidentiality. It weighs heavily on providers’ minds, as it should.

“Part of the challenge with behavioral health is the standard for data protection in 42 CFR, and I feel like providers might find this standard paralyzing when it comes to data sharing, because of the way it has been drilled into our minds that you can’t share certain types of data without all these additional protections,” Singletary-Twyman says. “I think people have been fearful of this platform.”

One key to overcoming these fears, she notes, is in the partners they choose.

## 6. Choose your partners carefully

Choosing the right partner can help states, counties and providers push past their regulatory concerns.

“I think having partners who are innovative and not paralyzed by the regulations and risks have helped us find success,” Singletary-Twyman says.

The cultural fit matters too. It’s key to bring your partners to the table and consider if goals and attitudes are aligned. Think through the logistics and visions with potential partners. Having these discussions early on could help avoid conflict after the contract is signed.

**“I think having partners who are innovative and not paralyzed by the regulations and risks have helped us find success.”**

**Michelle Singletary-Twyman**

Division Director of Operations  
at Delaware Division of Substance  
Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH)

## 7. Involve IT early

Providers know there are a lot of technicalities when it comes to implementing a new digital plan. It’s essential to have a solid IT department on your side.

“Make sure you involve the IT portion of your state agency early so that they understand what the mission is, because all of the restrictions around IT can be a hindrance if you don’t have them early,” Singletary-Twyman says.

## Moving Forward Into a New World of Behavioral Health Outcomes



Implementing a system like DTRN360 takes buy-in from various stakeholders. To gain consensus, it is essential to advocate for increased funding, access targeted technical and service assistance and leverage solutions that are tailored to meet the specific needs of persons served.

This ultimately means better patient care and a smoother referral pathway for providers.

“This platform will really help the people who are trying to help those clients because we’ll see where they are,” Singletary-Twyman says. She even jokes that as a former psych nurse, she will “pull a shift somewhere just to see it in action.”

“It will mean so much to the people who are working with these clients to have this information right at the front door,” she says. “It really will.”



***This white paper is sponsored by Bamboo Health. To learn more about improving behavioral health outcomes, visit:***

**[Transforming Behavioral Health in Delaware - Bamboo Health](#)**

