October 2024

Branches of Hope Counseling

Case for Support

Introduction

Mental health impacts every element of our daily lives. From the ways that we work to how we relate with our families, mental wellness allows us to be present in the moment and contribute positively to our communities.

Unfortunately, many of our neighbors in Ohio face mental health challenges which harm their quality of life. Thousands of Ohioans experience trauma, addiction, anxiety, and depression, and the negative outcomes of these experiences continue to grow. While we know that data-driven counseling can improve quality of life for those with mental health challenges, many face economic and social barriers to accessing this transformational care.

Branches of Hope crosses barriers to mental health care for Ohioans. We are a nonprofit team of counselors dedicated to employing best practices in modes accessible to people of all backgrounds. A trauma-informed, faith-sensitive methodology uniquely equips us to address holistic mental health challenges. Donor support and community partnerships allow us to meet and serve individuals who could not otherwise access professional care.

In 2025, we will expand our capacity by engaging 20 new clients from underinsured Ohio households. This expansion will allow us to connect a total of 60 individuals to care which will offer relief from negative mental health symptoms and improve their quality of life.

The following narrative introduces Branches of Hope and shares how community members, faith communities, and fellow agencies can partner in making this impactful expansion possible. Together, we can bring more and more Ohioans into care that offers healing and helps them to see a path forward—extending branches of hope to our neighbors who need them most.

Introducing Branches of Hope

Branches of Hope is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that offers counseling to Ohioans who cannot access mental health care. We envision a community where all people have healthy relationships, set good boundaries, and enjoy life. To realize this vision, we offer accessible, trauma-informed, and faith-friendly counseling to residents of underprivileged or rural Ohio communities.

Branches of Hope began in response to the unique mental health challenges faced by those living with addictions. Branden Heineman, our Executive Director, observed in his counseling practice that many potential clients chose not to pursue care due to the high cost of therapy. In 2024, he and his team responded to these challenges by transitioning their practice to a nonprofit model with a public mission to make mental health care available to all.

We have built a practice of seven counselors who share our vision for accessible care and presently offer in-person and virtual counseling to 40 clients. Our unique approach applies data-driven practices from a faith-sensitive lens which equips our clients to process past trauma, develop healthy spiritual attitudes, and thrive.

Our Methodology

Branches of Hope offers mental health counseling which leads our clients to build healthy relationships, set boundaries, and enjoy life again. We serve clients facing a broad range of mental health challenges, including addiction, trauma, depression, and anxiety. Our licensed counselors offer one-on-one sessions both in-person in Cincinnati and virtually across Ohio. Our counselors deploy data-driven care modalities,[[1]](#footnote-0) and two distinctives set our counseling apart:

First, Branches of Hope counseling is **trauma-informed**. All of our counselors have experience with trauma-informed methodology and seek to understand clients’ present mental health challenges through the lens of past adverse circumstances.

Second, Branches of Hope counseling is **faith-friendly**. Many individuals experiencing mental health challenges have adopted unhealthy spiritual attitudes (e.g., “God must hate me”). Our counselors are comfortable navigating these issues with clients who initiate such conversations.

These unique approaches position Branches of Hope to deliver transformational counseling to every client. To ensure the impact of services, each client completes the Satisfaction With Life Survey (SWLS) on a semiannual basis with each client. The SWLS is a brief, standardized mental health metric which prompts clients to report on their satisfaction in five key areas.

Historical data suggests that our average client begins to show significant improvements in their quality of life after one year of weekly counseling sessions. We have consistently seen counseling lead to reductions in symptoms and healthier relationships for the people we serve.

Mental Health Access Gaps in Ohio

Data-driven counseling is an effective way to improve quality of life for people with mental health challenges. This raises a key question: if we are aware of effective methods to treat mental health issues, why do our neighbors continue to face so many mental health challenges?

Mental health challenges have a pressing and widespread impact on quality of life for many Ohioans. 6% of adult Ohioans experience a serious mental health condition.[[2]](#footnote-1) When these conditions go untreated, our neighbors face serious consequences. Suicide deaths in Ohio increased by 27.4% between 2010 and 2019.

One-on-one counseling remains one of the most effective ways to treat mental health challenges and promote healing. However, of Ohio’s 88 counties, 75 have been designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas due either to an insufficient number of providers or an insufficient number of practitioners serving a specific target population.[[3]](#footnote-2)

In other terms, most Ohio counties have more people who are seeking or could seek professional care than they can actually serve. This shortage means that individuals with pressing mental health needs experience longer and longer wait times for care.

Furthermore, individuals making low or middle incomes experience additional barriers to accessing counseling. Medicaid and some insurance plans fully cover the cost of counseling. However, many people who generate middle incomes are not Medicaid eligible and do not have insurance coverage for mental healthcare. A 2022 national survey found that 23% of Americans are underinsured, and 46% of respondents reported skipping or delaying care due to cost.[[4]](#footnote-3)

These barriers mean that many people whose quality of life could significantly improve from professional care do not receive it. Counseling agencies must adopt creative approaches to overcome these barriers, connect people to care, and equip them for lasting mental wellness.

How We Create Access to Counseling

Branches of Hope takes special measures to ensure that individuals from low-income and rural communities can access care. Many potential clients we meet come from underinsured households. This means that they generate income above the threshold for Medicaid but do not have insurance sufficient to cover the mental health services that they need. These clients cannot afford to pay the standard rate for counseling.

As a nonprofit counseling center, Branches of Hope is in a unique position to overcome financial barriers to care. We seek and accept donations and sponsorships from individuals and businesses which help us to subsidize care for individuals from underinsured households. This third-party funding ensures that our underinsured clients only pay what they can afford, while allowing us to retain excellent professional counselors at competitive rates of pay.

Branches of Hope also has a unique partnership strategy which helps clients connect to counseling. We build partnerships with nonprofits and churches in the Greater Cincinnati region and across the state of Ohio. These community-based organizations have trusted relationships with many people who could benefit from counseling. When a community member reports a mental health challenge to our partners, they refer them to Branches of Hope for counseling.

For the many Ohioans who consider counseling financially inaccessible, this partnership model offers a relational pathway to enter professional care. Furthermore, it creates an avenue for the Branches of Hope team to advocate for healthy awareness and engagement with mental health issues across the populations served by our partners.

Opportunities for Partnership

Branches of Hope will expand counseling offerings in 2025 with the goal to serve more underinsured community members. We presently serve a total caseload of 40 clients. We have set a goal to expand our capacity and caseload to 60 total clients by the end of 2025. This expansion will grow our positive impact on mental wellness across Ohio.

This expansion will not be possible without the support of new partners. If you share our value for equal access to positive mental health outcomes across Ohio, we invite you to consider the following opportunities to partner with Branches of Hope.

First, expansion will require **funding support**. We aim for all 20 of the new clients we serve to come from underinsured households. The average client in this category can afford to spend $40 on a counseling session; the real cost to offer a counseling session is ~$150.

**Branches of Hope has set a goal to raise $100,000 to fill this funding gap in 2025.** We seek financial gifts from individual donors, services partners, and local foundations to support this amount. Your financial support will offset direct payment to counselors for sessions with underinsured clients, allowing us to sustainably expand the day-to-day work of the counseling program.

Second, expansion will require **partnership support**. Partner organizations including nonprofits, faith communities, and public agencies connect us to people facing mental health challenges who would benefit most from subsidized counseling.

**If you represent or are connected to a local community organization, we invite you to consider becoming a Branches of Hope referral partner.** Together, we can ensure that all of our neighbors across Ohio have access to support that is proven to improve their quality of life.

Next Steps

Thank you very much for taking the time to review these materials. We at Branches of Hope know that it will take partnership and collaboration to positively impact mental health outcomes in our community. To that end, we invite you to consider the following next steps.

If you would like to learn more about Branches of Hope, make a financial gift, or discuss organizational partnerships, please contact Branden Heineman, Executive Director, by phone at **(513) 312-2774** or by email at [**bheineman@**](mailto:bheineman@calvarybh.com)**branchesbh.org.** You can also learn more about Branches of Hope on our website at **[URL of new website]**.

We also encourage you to learn more about mental health issues impacting our communities. Links in the footnotes above will connect you to recent data on mental health outcomes. We hope they will be helpful as you consider your role as an advocate for mental wellness.

1. Exemplary methods include psychodynamic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and narrative therapy. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Statistics in this paragraph are taken from an Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services report available at <https://www.theohiocouncil.org/assets/BreakingPoint/TheOhioCouncil_Whitepaper_BreakingPoint.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Refer to the map here: <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/4e6d331f-5fd6-43b1-b355-accd0a07f56d/MH+HPSA+Map+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Data available in the report here: <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2022/sep/state-us-health-insurance-2022-biennial-survey#:~:text=By%20mid%2D2022%2C%2043%20percent,23%25)%20(see%20the%20box> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)