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Camber Children's Mental Health in Hays to start accepting patients

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A therapy room in the new Camber Children's Mental Health facility in Hays. The center is set to start accepting patients within the next two weeks. Photo by Cristina Janney/Hays Post

By **CRISTINA JANNEY**

Hays Post


Camber Children's Mental Health had a ribbon cutting for its new youth acute and residential mental health treatment facility on Friday in Hays.

The facility is expected to open for patients within the next couple of weeks, Camber officials said.

The new facility, 300 New Way Blvd., will replace the company's former pediatric mental health center in the Hadley Center.

Youth in the residential treatment program who are currently staying at the Hadley Center will move to the new facility.

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The facility will include acute pediatric beds, which have not been available in western Kansas since Camber, then known as KVC, [closed acute care beds at the Hadley Center in 2019.](#)



A common room in the acute care wing of the new Camber Children's Mental Health facility in Hays. There have been no acute mental health in-patient beds for children in western Kansas since 2019.

Inpatient acute treatment includes

1. Full medical, clinical and nursing assessment within the first 24 hours of admission
2. Intensive psychiatric care and medication management
3. Individual, family and group therapy sessions
4. Case coordination
5. 24/7 support and supervision from Camber's skilled nursing staff
6. Treatment and education to teach youth about their brains and how to regulate their emotions

The contract agreement between Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services and Camber, effective through 2027, specifies admissions at a licensed 14-bed hospital for youth up to 18 years to include up to 10 no-eject no-reject beds focused on patients from the Larned State Hospital catchment area, according to a press release issued by the Gov. Laura Kelly's office on Wednesday.

The press release said Camber will be able to serve 600 more youth each year who are facing struggles with suicidality, depression, anxiety, the impacts of trauma,

self-harm and other mental health disorders.



Camber's new children's mental health facility has rooms for both single and double occupancy, depending on children's needs. Photo by Cristina Janney/Hays Post

“We are grateful for the opportunity to expand our services in Hays and surrounding communities so we can further enhance the positive impact these services are making on the lives of children when they need it most,” said Camber Children’s Mental Health President Bobby Eklofe in the press release.

“This new treatment facility is equipped with the latest technology and safety monitoring in a welcoming, child-focused space, allowing children to receive critical therapeutic treatment as soon as they need it in an atmosphere that promotes healing and wellness.”

Jason Hooper, president and CEO of KVC Health Systems, said at the ribbon cutting the new facility has been specifically designed with the needs of children in mind.

"This is not where we want children," he said. "We want them in homes, but there is a population of youth and a population of adults that need this level of care."

Kelly did not attend the ribbon cutting Friday, but she issued a statement in the press release.

“Like much of the nation, we are at a crisis point here in Kansas regarding mental health,” Kelly said. “This hospital will provide the necessary resources and care for

young Kansans facing mental health crises.

"I am impressed with the commitment shown by the leaders at KDADS and Camber to not only the youth in western Kansas but also the communities this center will impact."



Art therapy room in the new Camber Children's Mental Health facility. Photo by Cristina Janney/Hays Post.

KDADS Secretary Laura Howard also issued a statement in that press release.

"The opening of this center in Hays offers a unique opportunity to expand capacity and address the needs related to mental health disorders for children and youth and as I've said before, comes at a time of critical consequence surrounding the issue of children's psychiatric services," she said.

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., attended the ribbon cutting on Friday and said providing mental health care for children is important in our country today.

"The opportunity of this outcome is we hope there are more healthy children living in more healthy families, living in more healthy communities, living in a more healthy state and living in a more healthy country," Moran said.

Andrew Brown, KDADS commissioner, said the facility in Hays increases the capacity for in-patient children's mental health care in Kansas but does not

completely solve the problem.



Dignitaries including Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., local legislators and city and county officials were on-hand Friday for the ribbon cutting for the new Camber Children's Mental Health facility in Hays. Photo by Cristina Janney/Hays Post

The state will still likely struggle to place children with highly specialized needs, such as those who have eating disorders or those children who have both intellectual disabilities or autism and a mental health condition.

Camber's new facility will save children and their families from traveling long distances for treatment. Since KVC closed its acute care beds at the Hadley Center in Hays, all children in western Kansas have been placed in facilities in either Wichita or Kansas City, hours away from their homes.

Doug Albin, Dane G. Hansen Foundation trustee, said those far-away placements made it more difficult for families from western Kansas to participate in their children's treatment.

Although KDADS was the primary funder of the new facility, three major foundations made \$11 million in donations to support the facility. Those included the Robert E. and Patricia A. Schmidt Foundation, the Patterson Family Foundation, and the Dane G. Hansen Foundation.

Scott Brunner, KDADS deputy secretary, attended the ribbon cutting. He said more adult acute mental health beds are in development in Sedgwick County, but that

project could be as much as two years out. The funds are available for that project, but construction has not yet begun.

Law enforcement as well as mental health and emergency health care staff in western Kansas have expressed concerns about long waiting periods for both adults and children who need in-patient mental health care.

Larned State Hospital, which provides adult in-patient mental health care in western Kansas, reduced its census during the pandemic and is still not at its full licensed capacity, Brown said Friday.

Families, community mental health centers, health care providers, schools and agencies seeking mental health treatment for youth can contact Camber's admissions team 24/7 at 913-890-7468.

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