



# MENTAL HEALTH COOPERATIVE

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## **Mental Health Cooperative Welcomes Michelle Schafer as New CEO** *Founder and previous CEO Pam Womack to retire after 31 years of service*

**Nashville, Tenn.** - The Mental Health Cooperative (MHC) announced the appointment of Michelle Schafer as its new Chief Executive Officer, succeeding founder and current CEO, Pam Womack.

Schafer, an accomplished business leader in the mental health community, begins her new role at MHC in early April 2024.

Prior to joining MHC, Schafer has dedicated her career to advocating for individuals facing mental illness and substance use disorders, demonstrating a commitment to community mental health. Her experience, spanning over 25 years in mental health, includes roles at SSM Health in St. Louis, MO, where she served as the Regional/System Vice President of Behavioral Health.

"It is an incredible honor to step into the CEO role at Mental Health Cooperative," said Schafer. "I am very grateful to the Board and leadership team for this opportunity and I look forward to continuing the legacy built by Pam Womack and the MHC team."

"Caring for those experiencing mental health and substance use disorders has been my passion and my life's work, aligning with MHC's focus and commitment to caring for the individual. I am eager to contribute to the health of the communities we serve and to advance the work that has made MHC a beacon of support."

During her tenure at SSM Health, Schafer played a pivotal role in transforming care delivery models, enhancing clinical quality and fostering mental health care integration. Her work as a champion for community mental health led to significant achievements, including being honored with the Missouri Hospital Association's "Aim for Excellence" award. Schafer's dedication aligns seamlessly with MHC's mission to serve the most vulnerable communities by providing access to mental health resources.

"I am deeply committed to carrying forward the compassionate care that is the foundation of MHC," continued Schafer. "Those we serve deserve our care and our advocacy. Every member of our community has a right to be seen and heard. Our work goes far beyond our care; it encompasses valuing each individual and providing them with the resources and support they need to have the life they deserve."

Schafer holds a master's degree in counseling and psychology as well as a Bachelor of Science in psychology from Indiana University - Bloomington. She also served as co-chair of the Behavioral Health Strategy Committee at Indiana University, designing a comprehensive system strategy for behavioral health services across the entire IU Health system.

The Mental Health Cooperative extends its deep gratitude to Pam Womack for her thoughtful and tireless leadership and service over the past 31 years. Born and raised in Memphis, Womack founded MHC in 1993 after 14 years of serving as Director of Community Services for the Tennessee Department of Mental Health.

Since its start in Nashville more than 30 years ago, MHC has expanded to 12 locations throughout the state. Over the last three years, MHC has also established the Partners in Care and REACH programs in Nashville, providing law enforcement and non-law enforcement alternatives for responding to mental health crisis calls within the city.

“Mental Health Cooperative was founded on the basis that, no matter your state in life or socio-economic status, every individual deserves access to quality mental health care,” said Womack. “What makes MHC unique is our dedication to treating the most seriously ill members of our community who are also navigating economic hardships.”

“We believe that our consumers are not defined by their mental illness; we practice and believe there *is* life after diagnosis.”

Through her leadership, MHC has expanded throughout the state, offering essential treatment to thousands of adults, children and families. Womack’s unwavering advocacy and passion for the most vulnerable citizens will serve as her enduring legacy.

“In times of crisis, empathy and understanding are just as important as mental health care. I trust that Michelle will build upon this foundation and enhance our commitment to meeting mental health needs in Tennessee,” continued Womack.

Womack’s vision and belief that individuals experiencing mental illness are not defined by their conditions will remain integral to MHC’s mission.

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#### **About Mental Health Cooperative:**

We empower individuals and families to live healthier lives. Through engagement in our collaborative approach to behavioral health, physical health, and substance use services individuals experience hope and a fulfilling life after diagnosis. By providing integrated care for the whole person, everyone can experience hope and live a full life in the community. MHC’s approach combines community-based care management, psychotherapy, psychiatry, crisis services, and primary care into an integrated, person-centered system of care. MHC operates 12 clinics throughout Middle, West and East Tennessee, including Nashville’s first 24/7 Walk-in Crisis Treatment Center. To find out more about Mental Health Cooperative, go to their website at <https://www.mhc-tn.org/>.