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## Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition 2016 Legislative Platform

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Behavioral health encompasses the full range of both mental health and substance use disorders. More than 1 million Marylanders live with a behavioral health issue and the stigma that comes with it. Proper treatment and recovery support are important components of healthcare that our family, friends and neighbors with these seemingly invisible illnesses depend upon to live productive and fulfilling lives.

Despite steadily increasing demand, behavioral health treatment has decreased as a percentage of Maryland's healthcare budget year after year. The one in four Marylanders living with a mental health or substance use disorder have increasing difficulty accessing the treatment services that they need.

To address this unmet need in our state, the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition supports the following budget and policy initiatives, and we call on Governor Hogan and the General Assembly to enact these recommendations.

- **Increase access to care by passing the Keep the Door Open Act (SB497/HB595) to ensure a robust and high-quality behavioral health workforce**

Community behavioral health providers administer traditional outpatient services, mobile treatment, crisis services, withdrawal management, rehabilitation, residential treatment, partial hospitalization programs and housing. They divert hospital and emergency room admissions, detention center admissions, help people experiencing homelessness get permanent housing and unemployed people get jobs. Many vulnerable Marylanders depend on these dedicated health care providers. Wages for these critical service providers simply have not kept up with the cost of living. **To ensure a quality behavioral healthcare workforce, we must index behavioral health provider rates to medical inflation.**

- **Support access to crisis services on demand by passing HB682/SB551 to develop a strategic plan for clinical crisis services and mobile crisis teams**

Crisis services significantly reduce preventable behavioral health crises and offer earlier intervention to quickly stabilize crises at the lowest appropriate level of care. A comprehensive crisis system provides effective treatment while decreasing avoidable emergency room visits and hospitalizations. Residents in all Maryland jurisdictions deserve an adequate comprehensive crisis system that includes this critical walk-in and mobile capacity.

**We must ensure that 24/7 walk-in crisis capacity and mobile crisis services are available in every jurisdiction statewide.**

- **Support the behavioral health provider rate increases in the budget and provide additional treatment resources to combat Maryland's opioid epidemic**

More than one million Marylanders are living with a mental health or substance use disorder, and Maryland's budget must support critical behavioral health services. The percentage of healthcare funding spent on behavioral health services in Maryland has decreased over the past thirty years, but the Governor's FY17 budget includes a much needed two percent increase in provider rates. In addition, Maryland must invest in proven substance use disorder treatment resources to accompany the Governor's proposed law enforcement actions.

**We must protect our most vulnerable Marylanders by adequately funding comprehensive behavioral health services.**

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*The Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition is a diverse mix of more than forty not for profit non-governmental organizations working together to ensure individuals affected by mental health and substance use disorders have high quality and accessible services that meet their needs. [www.KeepTheDoorOpenMD.org](http://www.KeepTheDoorOpenMD.org)*