



Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition 2016 Legislative Platform

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 supporting legislation 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 enacting legislation establishing walk-in and mobile crisis capacity in every jurisdiction**

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.

- **Provide the necessary resources to bolster our public behavioral health system (PBHS) and resist any cuts to the already strained PBHS budget**

The percentage of healthcare funding spent on mental health and substance use disorder services in Maryland has decreased over the past thirty years. We must ensure behavioral health treatment on demand and enhance funding to combat opioid and other substance use disorders. Any cuts to Maryland's underfunded PBHS would result in more costly emergency room visits, a continuing rise in suicides and overdose deaths, more homelessness and increased criminal justice involvement.

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

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