



Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition 2018 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition respectfully requests that you respond to the questions below on issues related to mental health and substance use disorders. The Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition is a diverse mix of nonprofit organizations working to ensure that individuals with mental health and substance use disorders have access to quality care and services that meet their needs.

To educate voters impartially and on a nonpartisan basis, complete candidate responses will be published verbatim on the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition website (<http://keepthedooropenmd.org/>) on October 16, 2018. To meet our publication deadline, your responses must be received no later than October 12, 2018. If you do not respond, the publication will state Did Not Respond.

Questions and responses will be used in compliance with all IRS rules for 501(c)(3) organizations.

Please respond to each question in 200 words or less, and submit completed questionnaires to Dan Martin via email at dmartin@mhamd.org.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, and for taking the opportunity to communicate your views on behavioral health issues and policy.

Candidate Name	Ken Kerr
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1. What would you propose to reduce stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders?

I would propose that employer-based health insurance cover mental health and substance abuse coverage. In appropriate occupations employees with substance abuse issues would be offered treatment prior to disciplinary action that would result in termination. Mental health and substance abuse would be seen as physical illnesses and not the result of personal failings.

2. What strategies would you employ to reduce overdose deaths and suicides?

I support expansion of medical cannabis as an alternative to opiates for pain management. I support Red Flag laws that can temporarily remove guns from the home of someone suspected of being a danger to themselves or others.

3. What specific initiatives would you propose to better address the prevention, early intervention and treatment needs of children and youth living with mental illness and/or substance use disorders?

I would support increase presence of psychologists and social worker in public school for early intervention of children showing signs of mental health issues or behaviors that may indicate an underlying mental health condition. Similarly, social workers and psychologist can help identify early signs of substance abuse in school children or in the home. Public school teachers should receive up-to-date professional development on identifying signs of mental health conditions and early indications of substance abuse.

4. Maryland's older adults are the fastest growing demographic with unmet mental health and substance use disorder needs. How would you address the behavioral health needs of this population?

Medicare should cover psychological counseling. Many older adults are isolated and have no one to notice behavioral changes that may indicate an underlying mental health issue or substance abuse. Primary care providers for elderly patients should make an evaluation as to the state of mental health at annual check-ups and refer appropriate services with follow-up for patient compliance.

5. What would you do to increase the availability of mental health and addiction providers in the state?

I support state funding for school psychologists as a means of identifying and addressing mental health and substance abuse issues in children. I also support increased on-demand substance abuse treatment centers and workplace protections for employees who take advantage of them.

6. How would you ensure health insurance plans are in compliance with existing behavioral health parity laws and educate consumers about their rights to equitable mental health and addiction coverage?

In Maryland, 84% get medical coverage through employer programs, Medicare, and Medicaid. Making sure compliance, parity, and education are present in these three would address this issue for the vast majority of Marylanders

7. What would you do to ensure that low income individuals with mental health and substance use disorders have access to safe, stable and affordable housing?

I am in support of the Maryland Affordable Housing Coalitions legislative initiatives to increase funding for Rental Housing Works. I also support raising the minimum wage to a point that families who work full-time are able to afford housing. I support continued funding of the Maryland Department of Disabilities Rental Allowance program that provides 12-months of emergency housing. This would give those suffering from mental health issues and recovering from substance abuse the time they need to become stable and able to return to the workforce.

8. What strategies would you employ to address the overrepresentation of individuals with behavioral health needs in Maryland jails and prisons?

Often, offenders with mental health issues are arrested and confined for non-violent offences such as trespassing and drug possession. When confined, they often do not get the treatment they need. It is far less expensive to provide treatment and supervision than to imprison them at a cost of nearly \$30,000 per year. Weekly treatment and monitoring would allow the non-violent offender to remain employed and productive while serving probation outside of a correctional facility.

9. Given the continuing rise in demand for mental health and substance use disorder services, what steps would you take to move Maryland toward a system with true on-demand access and comprehensive behavioral health crisis response services?

In 2018, much progress was made in this area. An additional \$16 million was allocated for the mental health workforce, and another \$12 million for crisis intervention. In addition to continued support for these, I also would seek to increase funding for public school-based psychologists and social workers