

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition



Alliance of Community Service Providers

Brook Glen Behavioral Hospital

Clarion Psychiatric Center

Conference of Allegheny Providers (CAP)

Fairmount Behavioral Health System

Family Training and Advocacy Center (FTAC)

Foundations Behavioral Health

Friends Hospital

Horsham Clinic

Keystone Center

Lancaster Behavioral Health Hospital

MAX Association

Meadows Psychiatric Center

Mental Health Association of PA (MHA)

National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) Keystone PA

PA Council of Children, Youth & Family Services (PCCYFS)

Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators of Mental Health and Developmental Services (PACA MH/DS)

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Association (PMHCA)

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Leadership Council (PPLC)

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)

The Roxbury Treatment Center

Treatment Advocacy Center

Chronic Underfunding, a Workforce Shortage, and the Global Pandemic Are Worsening a Mental Health Service Crisis

Action:

We respectfully urge you to support the Governor's \$36.6M line item for county-funded mental health services.

This is only the beginning of improving payments to providers and ensuring that services continue for the most vulnerable of Pennsylvanians.

Why:

The Commonwealth mental health care system needs adequate resources and a strong workforce to provide appropriate care wherever people are — whether in community clinics, residential programs, hospitals, or virtually by telehealth.

- The pandemic has served to compound and accelerate the negative impact of longstanding shortages of mental health professionals and the lack of investment in mental health services across the Commonwealth. Moreover, the anxiety, stress, and tragic loss associated with the pandemic have resulted in more Pennsylvanians seeking help.
- Our mental health system is in crisis. Signs are all around us, including an increase in suicides, an increase in boarding in emergency departments, excessive wait times for mental health services, and rising incarceration rates for those suffering from mental illnesses.

Chronic underfunding is a primary cause of the crisis facing the county-based community mental health system.

County-based mental health funding was decreased over a decade ago and has remained level-funded since. If this were a typical private business, the company would have raised prices or been forced to shut down. However, when the funders are federal and state governments, organizations do not have the option to increase prices. As mission-driven organizations, they try to do the best they can for people in need. The best of intentions have now met the reality of insufficient funds, proving that the status quo is not sustainable.

It is a wonderful feeling to help others, but only when one can sustain themselves. Mental health workers cannot support their families with current wages.

Counties and providers have been trying to make the best use of funds to ensure services are available. Relying solely on the commitment and dedication of individuals is no longer feasible in the face of the labor market changes and workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic.

Competing with Wawa, Sheetz, Home Depot, and Amazon for employees is the new normal.

- We have heard from human service providers of all kinds about the mass exodus of workers to “non-caring” positions. People employed by the types of businesses noted above go to work and can simply go home. Their hours on any given day are not dependent upon if or when the next caregiver arrives. Furthermore, additional notes or follow-up are not required.
- In human services, people cannot simply clock out at the end of a shift. They are emotionally connected to the people served, their families, and the work — the job is both physically and emotionally taxing. Toileting, assisting in personal care, cooking, feeding, and sometimes being required to travel to unsafe environments, is difficult.

We must *pay better* and *do better* in order to help our fellow Pennsylvanians in need.