



2020-2021 POLICY PRIORITIES

Advancing Behavioral Health and Wellness

STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS SERVICES

A broader investment in behavioral health crisis response services is essential to divert people from ED visits and interactions with law enforcement. A comprehensive, integrated crisis response system serves as a critical access point to help individuals in crisis, while reducing harm and overall costs for the health care system. Baltimore City is fortunate to have some key behavioral health crisis response services; however, there are still gaps in services. This results in unnecessary Emergency Department visits and hospitalizations and interactions with law enforcement for people with mental health and substance use disorders. Baltimore City is under a consent decree with the US Department of Justice, which has important implications for behavioral health crisis response in the city.

SUPPORT FUNDING COMMITMENTS FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The Fiscal Year 2021 budget and beyond must include the 4 percent rate increase for behavioral health providers to ensure access to mental health and substance use treatment and recovery support services. Behavioral health programs provide a range of behavioral health care including therapeutic clinical treatment and recovery support services to assist individuals and families achieve stability and recovery. The HOPE Act of 2017 and the subsequent minimum wage legislation of 2019 provide multi-year reimbursement rate increases for behavioral health services. The rate increases support the infrastructure for public behavioral health system and increase access to life-saving services for vulnerable individuals in our community.

INCREASE SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

To support academic achievement, full funding of the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission is needed to ensure equitable access to early intervention and school-based behavioral health services. Early intervention and access to behavioral health services in Baltimore schools can provide many students with the necessary resources to thrive in the classroom and achieve academic success. The Kirwan Commission released an interim report in January 2019 that adopted a set of recommendations to address students behavioral health needs, such as increased training for school personnel, the scaling of school behavioral health services in all jurisdictions, systemic screening and identification of student needs, and a statewide system of accountability and outcome measurement.



IMPROVE MARYLAND'S PUBLIC BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Efforts to improve the system should promote integration and define and clarify the role and authority for local system management agencies to ensure there is active and consistent oversight of behavioral health services and access to a full range of behavioral health services in the community. Maryland's public behavioral health system (PBHS) is a nationally recognized model, however, there is opportunity to improve the system to ensure cost-effectiveness and quality of care. Local system management and planning agencies (LBHAs, CSAs, LAAs) play a key role in Maryland's PBHS, overseeing and coordinating access to behavioral health services and supports to address the particular needs and gaps in their community. Unfortunately, the lines of authority and responsibility for system oversight are unclear between local authorities and the state.

SUPPORT A COORDINATED RESPONSE TO ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) must be incorporated into State policies and procurement so that funding is targeted directly to communities and interventions that mitigate the effects of childhood trauma. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that can have a profound impact on a child's health and well-being lasting into adulthood. Communities play a big role in supporting a child's healthy development and buffering the impact of childhood trauma and ACEs.

PROMOTE HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES

Policies that support harm reduction interventions and promote inclusion of people who use drugs improve the health and safety of our communities must be incorporated and advanced in public policy making. Harm reduction is an approach that utilizes practical strategies to reduce negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm reduction interventions, such as naloxone distribution and overdose prevention sites provide innovative and effective ways to engage people who use drugs around safer drug use and link them to treatment and support services.