



Fact Sheet: Opportunities to Expand Behavioral Health Services

May 2022

Access to behavioral health care services in Pennsylvania is in crisis. The pandemic escalated the challenges even more, affecting patients' ability to access the care they need and further straining hospitals already stressed by COVID-19 and a workforce crisis.

The General Assembly has an opportunity this budget cycle to make meaningful investments that will help Pennsylvanians access the care they need when and where they need it. This is a key first step in a long-term effort to strengthen behavioral health care in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvanians are struggling to access the behavioral health care they need.

- There aren't enough services available. Patients in crisis may wait a day, a week, or even more in the emergency department because post-acute care is not available.
- Workforce challenges are a primary factor limiting behavioral health services. There are simply not enough behavioral health care professionals in Pennsylvania to meet the need for services. Hospitals and other providers want to expand and launch new programs to help specific populations, such as children or rural communities, but they cannot find the staff they need.
- Payments to behavioral health providers must accurately reflect the cost of care and be sufficient to attract and retain staff. In the current state framework, providers do not have the resources to offer the competitive wages needed to attract and retain behavioral health and support professionals.

The General Assembly has an immediate opportunity to improve access.

- **Bolster community and home-based behavioral health services** by increasing state funding for county mental health programs by at least \$28 million.
- **Ensure hospitals have resources to care for patients with complex needs** by requiring that Medicaid payment rates properly reflect the cost of complex cases, longer stays, and resource-intensive treatments and that behavioral health Medicaid managed care organizations provide psychiatric support in emergency departments.
- **Facilitate placement in post-acute care settings** by including an additional \$13 million to county mental health funding to assist emergency departments and passing House Bill 1644 to establish complex care transition teams to help when inpatient, psychiatric residential treatment, or other settings are unable to discharge patients.

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