



June 18, 2024

The Honorable Scott Martin  
Chairman, Appropriations Committee  
Senate Box 203013  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Jordan Harris  
Chairman, Appropriations Committee  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
512-E Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Martin and Chairman Harris:

Pennsylvania's behavioral health care delivery system is in crisis. Thousands of Pennsylvanians are not receiving the right care, at the right time, or in the right setting. Too often across the commonwealth, those with unmet behavioral health needs are reaching crisis and seeking care in hospital emergency departments, and staying too long in settings that may not be equipped for their ongoing treatment needs. The situation can be devastating for the person in crisis, of course, but it can also exacerbate emergency department overcrowding and intensify workforce strain, which are both factors in violence in health care settings.

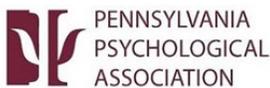
The Pennsylvania Provider Advocacy Coalition urges the General Assembly to invest in Pennsylvania's behavioral health care delivery system. Please allocate funding for critical mental health services by—at a minimum—adopting the Administration's fiscal year 2024–2025 state budget proposals for mental health expenditures.

The Administration's proposed budget includes an \$85.6 million increase in the mental health services appropriation. If enacted, it would replace federal funding to sustain current investments; expand diversion and discharge programs for those associated with the criminal justice system; provide access to home and community-based services; and continue to transition individuals from the state's hospitals to their home communities.

The following are of note:

**\$20 million increase in the county mental health line item.** These funds seek to address community-based services and in-home support needs by continuing to revive funding for county mental health services. These funds provide access to recovery supports for vulnerable Pennsylvanians not covered by Medical Assistance, commercial, or Medicare coverage. The provider coalition considers this sum in the context of the Governor's multi-year commitment to this budget line, and believes that it should be considered by the General Assembly to be the minimum possible increase. Greater levels of sustained investments are needed over time to meet current needs.

**\$5 million to maintain walk-in mental health crisis stabilization centers serving multiple counties.** These funds would build the infrastructure necessary to support those experiencing behavioral health crisis and expand



access to timely, effective crisis care. While some individuals will still require emergency department intervention, the majority can be effectively evaluated and stabilized in non-emergency department based—and less costly—settings.

**\$10 million to support the 988 Lifeline network for mental health services to provide trained crisis response professionals who can support people who are considering suicide, self-harm, or who have any behavioral or mental health needs.** The 988 Lifeline also serves those who are looking to help a loved one who may be experiencing a mental health crisis. Lifeline services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no cost to the caller.

Additionally, there are several specific initiatives we would like to highlight, including certain areas we would recommend the General Assembly build on the Administration’s proposal with enhanced investments:

**\$40 million to help address the pervasive and widespread challenges recruiting and retaining behavioral health professionals, which have led to an underdeveloped and stressed workforce.** Responding to this challenge was one of the major recommendations of the Act 54 Behavioral Health Commission and impacts all segments of the behavioral health system.

**\$15 million to provide supplemental assistance to the 23 freestanding inpatient psychiatric hospitals across the commonwealth to enhance availability of inpatient and outpatient services.** These facilities generally have been omitted from previous state efforts to assist hospitals in the pandemic and are an essential part of the response to the continuing mental health crisis unfolding across the commonwealth. It is critical that we maintain and enhance the capacity of these facilities to accept referrals from emergency departments and crisis response services.

Clearly these investments are not comprehensive solutions for the challenges we face as a commonwealth. We eagerly await recommendations from the Pennsylvania Behavioral Health Council and their plan to address Pennsylvanians’ growing behavioral health needs. Nonetheless, the status quo is untenable, and we must act now.

The proposed funds provide targeted investments in many areas where we struggle the most to meet Pennsylvanians’ needs. The mental health and health care provider community needs help bolstering our capacity to respond to crisis situations and support the long-term recovery and community participation of so many of our family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

We support these initiatives and urge you to pass a budget that prioritizes funding these necessary, life-saving services.

Thank you for considering our hard-earned experience in this work. We stand ready to assist you as you seek to develop a budget that will meet the most fundamental needs of all Pennsylvanians.



PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY  
OF HEALTH-SYSTEM  
PHARMACISTS



[The Urban Health Care Coalition  
of Pennsylvania](#)

Chairman Martin and Chairman Harris

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Sincerely,

Ambulance Association of Pennsylvania

Free Clinic Association of Pennsylvania

National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter

Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians

Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers

Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners

Pennsylvania College of Emergency Physicians

Pennsylvania Community Health Worker Collaborative

Pennsylvania Medical Society

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Leadership Council

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society

Pennsylvania Psychological Association

Pennsylvania Rheumatology Society

Pennsylvania Rural Health Association

Pennsylvania Society of Health-System Pharmacists

Pennsylvania Society of Physician Associates

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association

The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

The Urban Health Care Coalition of Pennsylvania