



The Hospital + Healthsystem
Association of Pennsylvania

Leading for Better Health

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Kim Ward
President Pro Tempore
Pennsylvania Senate
Senate Box 203039
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3039

The Honorable Mark Rozzi
Speaker
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
P.O. Box 202126
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2126

The Honorable Joe Pittman
Republican Leader
Pennsylvania Senate
Senate Box 203041
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3041

The Honorable Joanna McClinton
Democratic Leader
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
P.O. Box 202191
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2191

The Honorable Jay Costa
Democratic Leader
Pennsylvania Senate
Senate Box 203043
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3043

The Honorable Bryan Cutler
Republican Leader
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
P.O. Box 202100
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2100

Dear Leaders of the Pennsylvania General Assembly,

On behalf of approximately 235 member hospitals—including 157 hospital emergency departments and nearly 85 inpatient behavioral health units, institutions for mental disease and standalone psychiatric hospitals—The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania urges the General Assembly to act as quickly as possible to authorize expenditures as they have been recommended to you by the Behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health.

Hospital professionals pride themselves on providing high-quality, 24/7 care to every person who walks through their doors. After meeting a patient's physical needs, however, an acute care hospital is often not the most effective setting in which to deliver mental health treatment.

The commonwealth's hospitals are overwhelmed by the increasing number of Pennsylvanians presenting with mental health conditions and the decreasing availability of behavioral health services statewide. This lack of services not only impedes progress for patients with mental health concerns, it also negatively affects others who need care. For example, given recent surges of RSV, COVID-19, and flu, wait times for all patients increased in emergency departments. Similarly, patients who need to be admitted for other ailments cannot be treated in acute care beds or by clinical staff who are occupied by patients awaiting transfer to meet their mental health needs.

We commend the commission's swift work to identify, learn, and synthesize input from a vast array of stakeholders to determine an effective allocation of these funds. We believe that their

work has identified a number of positive steps forward in addressing this state's enormous, multi-faceted, and high-stakes need.

While we believe that all of the commission's recommendations are worthy, we highlight a subset as having the potential to be particularly significant for hospitals, which serve a key foundational function in Pennsylvania's overall continuum of care.

The hospital community draws particular attention to the commission's focus on the urgent need to incentivize, invest in, retain, and grow the health care workforce. You are well aware that there is a nationwide crisis with detrimental implications for patients, health care professionals, and facilities. Pennsylvania is no exception. While all practitioners need help in all settings, the shortage of behavioral health clinicians and support professionals is profound—53 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties (nearly 80%) are designated as full or partial Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas.

The hospital community believes that a number of the commission's other recommendations have meaningful value as well. We believe that developing well-trained peer supports can augment current providers and improve treatment success. We believe that walk-in and mobile crisis services can—for some patients—offer viable alternatives to emergency department intervention. And we believe that investments to better integrate behavioral health treatment into primary care settings have the potential to divert patients from the path of crisis.

Once these dollars start moving into action, we respectfully ask that you build upon this work in a number of ways including, but not limited to, addressing pediatric mental health needs with intensity and determination.

HAP and its members stand ready to assist you in this critical work. Our patients and staff need your help.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to HAP's [Heather Tyler](#) at (717) 733-1997.

Sincerely,

Andy Carter
President and CEO