

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

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

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

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Association (PMHCA)

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Leadership Council (PPLC)

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)

The Roxbury Treatment Center

Treatment Advocacy Center

October 20, 2022

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

On behalf of the Coalition for the Behavioral Health Safety Net, we are writing to support the recommendations of the Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health Services and urge the General Assembly to take the necessary steps to authorize the disbursement of those funds prior to adjourning.

As you know, mental illness and other behavioral health challenges are impacting families across the Commonwealth. **The status quo is not sustainable, and the need for the additional funds is urgent.**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of our mental health system were under significant stress. The ongoing pandemic has created an unprecedented series of challenges for our mental health system, including dramatic increases in the need for mental health services, significant health staff shortages, and unparalleled changes in the labor market. There are also increases in suicides and heightened ongoing ravages of diseases of despair/substance use disorders.

Adequate funding for county mental health services is a critical element of the Commonwealth's response to these shared challenges. The county mental health services, with their coordinating role and gap-filling services, are a key component of optimizing the Commonwealth's investment in mental health and improving outcomes for our families and neighbors.

The cumulative effect of years of underinvestment, reduced service capacity, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is creating an environment that is prone to dangerous outcomes. **The failure to invest in community-based mental health services is leading to both higher costs in other systems (e.g., EDs and law enforcement) and needless human suffering.** It is in all of our interests to begin the process of rebuilding our community-based mental health system. The Commonwealth's mental health system is out of balance and all too often lacks the capacity to intervene with the right service, in the right setting, and at the right time.

The Commission's recommendations overall are on target and have resulted in a remarkable degree of consensus among stakeholders. In addition to these one-time investments, we urge the General Assembly to focus on the need for ongoing financial support of the Commonwealth's behavioral health system, as well as the need to coordinate the \$100 million fund with the comparable investment in school-based mental health services. In this context, there is a need for an ongoing Behavioral Health Commission or some other forum, to develop a shared vision for mental health services in the Commonwealth, and a coordinated set of strategies to achieve that vision.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,

Coalition for the Behavioral Health Safety Net