

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition



**Alliance of Community
Service Providers**

**Aspire Child & Family
Services**

**Bedford-Somerset
Developmental &
Behavioral Health
Services**

**Bell Socialization
Services**

The Bradley Center

**Brooke Glen Behavioral
Hospital**

**Chester County
Department of MH/IDD**

Children First

**Children's Home of
Reading (CHOR)**

**Children's Service Center
of Wyoming Valley, Inc.**

**Clarion Psychiatric
Center**

**Community Services
Group**

**County Commissioner's
Association of
Pennsylvania**

Eleos Health

**Family Services of
Northwest Pennsylvania**

**Chestnut Ridge
Counseling, Inc.**

**Institute for Behavioral
Change (IBC)**

**Intercommunity Action,
Inc.**

**Fairmont Behavioral
Health Systems**

Friends Hospital

**Foundations Behavioral
Health**

Mental Health Safety Net Services Funding: Workforce Demands Critical to Sustainability

Problem: The mental health crisis in the United States has contributed to a significant increase in suicides, depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders over the last two decades, and the pandemic only exacerbated behavioral health needs. Despite an increased need for mental health services, there has not been an increase in access to care.

According to the 2024 HRSA State of the Behavioral Workforce report, without change to the current system, there will be substantial shortages of counselors, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and school counselors projected to 2037.

There are simply not enough behavioral healthcare providers to meet the needs of the population. Pennsylvania is ranked thirty-second in access to mental health care providers, with a 400:1 ratio, falling behind the national average of 340:1 ([Mental Health America Report 2024](#)). There are a multitude of factors that affect the ability of the behavioral health workforce to provide quality care, including:

- Inadequate reimbursement rates;
- Unfunded cost of providing services;
- Lack of a sustainable workforce;
- Outdated and inflexible regulatory process demands; and
- High turnover rates due to administrative burden, burnout, and wellbeing.

As mission-driven organizations, these providers try to do the best they can for people in need and their staff with what they have. The best of intentions has now met the reality of insufficient funds. The status quo is not sustainable. It is wonderful to help others, but caregivers cannot support themselves. Counties and providers have been trying to make the best use of funds to ensure services are available, but relying on the commitment and dedication of staff is no longer feasible in the face of the labor market changes and workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic.

Competing with Wawa, Sheetz, Home Depot, and Amazon for employees is the new normal. We have heard from human service providers of all kinds about the mass exodus of workers to "non-caring" positions. People employed by the above types of businesses go to work and can simply go home. Caregiver jobs are both physically and emotionally taxing. Getting less money for harder work does not "work."

Small community-based mental health providers are simply unable to compete with these big box stores on salaries to attract caregivers. With salaries comprising over 80% of their budgets, double digit increases in labor costs, and being dependent on state funds for 100% of their annual revenue, the level state funding over the past decade has placed these providers in an untenable position.

**Haven Behavioral
Hospital of Eastern
Pennsylvania**
**Haven Behavioral
Hospital of Philadelphia**
**Haven Behavioral
Hospital of Philadelphia**
Horsham Clinic
**Lancaster Behavioral
Health Hospital**
MAX Association
**Meadows Psychiatric
Center**
Merakey
**PA Council of Children
Youth & Family Services
(PCCYFS)**
**Philadelphia Mental
Health Care Corporation
(PMHCC)**
**Rehabilitation and
Community Providers
Association (RCPA)**
Renewal, Inc.
**Roxbury Treatment
Center**
**Stairways Behavioral
Health**
Strawberry Fields Inc.
True North Wellness
UPMC
**Westmoreland
Casemanagement and
Supports, Inc.**

Solution: While there is no simple solution to the mental healthcare provider shortage, there are steps that can be taken to improve access to care.

- Funding through the behavioral health capitation and county allocations that support the retention of and hiring of behavioral health staff.
- Incentive programs, such as tuition assistance or reimbursement for students entering high demand behavioral health professions.
- A critical review of outdated regulations and practices that create administrative burden and barriers to staff hiring, which will create pathways to building the workforce infrastructure and subsequent access to care.

For Fiscal Year 2025/26, the Mental Health Safety Net Coalition respectfully urges the Governor and General Assembly to take the following actions:

1. Appropriate, at a minimum, the proposed \$20M increase in county-based mental health base funding, and an additional \$80M for a total of \$100M for county-based mental health services, consistent with CCAP's recommendation.
2. Appropriate the \$100M requested to enhance services for children in need through coordinated efforts with community-based mental health providers and the strengthening of the Student Assistance Programs (SAP).
3. Appropriate the proposed \$640M increases in the HealthChoices Behavioral Health Capitation to support critical and life-sustaining Medicaid behavioral health services.
4. Pass the proposed \$15M in ongoing development of Crisis Walk-in Centers and support the implementation of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline across the Commonwealth to ensure immediate access to those in behavioral crisis.
5. Appropriate \$15M to support the 21 free-standing psychiatric hospitals in the FY 2025/26 state budget to help stabilize this important part of the mental health service continuum in the Commonwealth.

We respectfully urge all members of the House and Senate, regardless of political perspective, to ask your respective leaders to ensure these investments in mental health services are included in mental health services in the FY 2025/26 budget.

Sincerely,

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition