



## **Mental Health Community Base Investment Key Talking Points for Community Coalition**

### **BACKGROUND**

- The commonwealth must effectively collaborate with its community partners to fully support the needs of our most vulnerable citizens who are affected by mental health issues, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Counties deliver critical mental health services on behalf of the state, which must be properly funded to ensure that the residents are able to access the care that they need. These mental health services are a part of a larger system of care that extends beyond the county walls to law enforcement, schools, medical care and family services, all of which rely on a sturdy foundational base of community mental health program availability.
- Inadequately funding these essential county-based programs has a trickle-down effect in our communities, negatively impacting and further stretching resources in hospitals, law enforcement, schools, emergency departments and more.
- As entities that have a vested interest in seeing our residents have more up-front, community programs for mental health services, we join forces to support increased state funding for community-based mental health services to counties.

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### **APPROPRIATE FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE CRUMBLING MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM**

**SUMMARY:** Counties, as the providers of community-based mental health services, are seeing demands for mental health services in communities that far exceed state funding levels and without adequate and sustainable funding, counties may not be able to meet the mental health needs of some of our most vulnerable residents. This long-term underfunding is having far reaching impacts that also affect mental health crisis care, availability of services and staff, having the necessary providers and further stress the work and capacity of hospitals, first responders, schools and others as lack of service availability burdens the larger community system.

- Counties provide essential community-based mental health services such as crisis intervention, community residential programs, family-based support and outpatient care, which are critical to the well-being of our constituents and our communities.
- And because counties play such a critical role in providing mental health support in the community, it's imperative that they receive adequate and sustainable funding to continue arranging for the highest quality and broadest range of services to fit local needs.
- State funding has lagged far behind needs and caseloads for years, which has negatively affected services while also putting tension on their wider communities and local budgets.
- Despite insufficient funding, counties have continued to invest local dollars to provide quality care and run efficient programs to keep costs down; however, a dollar now in 2022

simply does not go as far as that same dollar a decade ago, and without increases in funding to the mental health base, that difference in funding is just the magic that counties are being asked to work.

- To preserve mental health services, a targeted, strategic investment of state dollars into county community mental health services is necessary. This will sustain the existing safety net and bolster the availability of mental health services.
- We are advocating for substantial investment of state dollars to rebuild and strengthen community crisis services, residential mental health programs and other locally-provided care that will stabilize mental health services and assist hospitals, other community resources, and our county jails with becoming defacto safety nets when traditional access channels are pushed beyond capacity.
- Relatedly, the mental health base must then receive annual increases from the state that will continue to provide a stable and sustainable funding source to assure that the safety net continues to be available for locally-provided services and care and allows for the building of a more comprehensive community-based partnership system.
- Counties have kept costs down in part by utilizing the Behavioral HealthChoices program. This program must be preserved to allow counties to coordinate and invest in mental health and drug and alcohol programs and services that meet local needs.
- Investing in the mental health community base is a critical step in strengthening the existing system so that people can get the care and supports they need, in turn strengthening our communities and supporting the work of our partners.
- Furthermore, this critical investment to county programs will alleviate strains on our partners throughout the system, who are feeling the effects of not only the pandemic-related care needs, but also the compounding results of long-term underfunding of the mental health base in our communities.
- Relief is needed now and will assist all of us to better fulfill our responsibilities on behalf of the state, better serve those in need in our communities and assure that appropriate mental health supports and responses are in place.

### **PERSONALIZE YOUR DISCUSSION**

- To the extent possible, include local stories that may resonate with your legislators. For example, was there a situation that occurred within your community that could have had a different outcome if there were more available funds? Or is there a success story your community has seen that comes from a program that base funds paid for?
- If the county were to receive an increase in funding, what programs or services could you stand up or develop? What would the actualized impact of these services be? (i.e., number of residents that could be served, potential savings that could be seen from keeping programming at the community level, predicted decrease stress on another community system/partner)
- To the extent possible and appropriate, include data that may show the increased need for mental health funding in your community, such as suicide rates, increased caseloads elsewhere (schools), emergency department crisis caseloads, law enforcement crisis call response rates