

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

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

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

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Association (PMHCA)

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Leadership Council (PPLC)

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)

The Roxbury Treatment Center

Treatment Advocacy Center

Critical County Mental Health Funds Needed for Student Assistance Program (SAP)

Mental health funding is needed to assist schools in preventing disruption and potentially adverse outcomes for youth. Youth that can remain in school and have difficulties addressed early in life can avoid more intensive and expensive approaches or, worse, placement in a treatment or correctional facility. This safety net exists where there is still sufficient funding for the Student Assistance Program (SAP).

SAP relies on county funding for mental health professionals to collaborate with their local educators and substance abuse counselors and develop a safe and drug-free environment as well as promote mental health wellness in schools. The intent is that, through this collaboration, a student can achieve academic success and obtain referrals as appropriate while gaining knowledge about and access to services and supports they may not have been able to otherwise. This service is available regardless of insurance as long as funding supports the mental health component. A school without collaboration from the mental health field **and** appropriate funding in place cannot provide these essential services.

County mental health funding for SAP impacts:

- Early identification of concerns with students;
- Joint prevention efforts between drug and alcohol liaisons and mental health liaisons in creating a healthy environment for students;
- Early intervention to meet student needs;
- Referrals and linkages to appropriate services and/or activities, including complete student and parent assessments/screenings for symptoms of suicidal ideation, depression, and anxiety, to determine needs; assistance with postvention; and conduct groups;
- Trainings for SAP resources, as every SAP team (from elementary school to high school) consists of teachers, school counselors, administrators, nurses, and other school staff. These team members must be trained in the intensive 2-day SAP model training, which is evidence-based. SAP MH and D&A liaisons are a part of these teams;
- The ability to meet with parents to discuss concerns and engage them in the prevention/intervention efforts; and
- An integrated approach to decrease interruption of youth development.

SAP is not a county mandated service. This means that, as county funding decreases, the support for SAP decreases so that counties can meet their mandates. Mandates are targeted to those most in need, which typically do not include students in school. Schools have to make up the difference through grants and other sources if they need more services from the liaisons.

The cost of support services has skyrocketed over the past 15 years and even more in the past two years. Base funds have not increased in this time; in fact, the budget was cut by 10% in 2012, leaving county mental health systems, their providers, and those we serve in a perilous situation. We urge you, because of this, to support increasing county mental health funds. Our system and services are fragile, and funds are needed to help the individuals who are currently experiencing difficulties in their daily lives due to mental health issues, which have worsened with the advent of COVID. Helping youth early on will prevent the need for more intense, traumatizing, and costly services in the future. Our youth and families are depending on your support.