

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition



February 28, 2023

Dear Members of the General Assembly,

It's about time... It's been 236 days since the General Assembly unanimously voted to spend \$100 million to help address the mental health crisis. It's been over 7 months since Governor Wolf signed Act 54 of 2022 which authorized this expenditure — treatment delayed is treatment denied...

It's about time... It's been 148 days since the Behavioral Health Commission submitted recommendations to the General Assembly on how to allocate the \$100 million. It's been over 3 months since the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services held a hearing on these recommendations — treatment delayed is treatment denied...

It's about time... The mental health system is in crisis...the status quo is not sustainable. **The failure to invest in county community-based mental health services is leading to both higher costs and needless human suffering...**

It's about time... It's been over 12 years since state funds for county mental health services were increased...

It's about time... While Pennsylvanians wait for the General Assembly to act, the constellation of mental health challenges grows larger:

- At least four in ten US adults (41%) and 58% of young adults (ages 18–29) have experienced high levels of psychological distress since the early stages of the pandemic (Pew Research Center).
- Over 2 million Pennsylvanians live in a federally designated mental health professional shortage area where only 38% of mental health treatment needs are met (Kaiser Family Foundation).
- Despite increased demand for services, close to 50% of responding mental health providers reduced caseloads due to staffing shortages (RCPA Workforce Survey).
- The mean hourly wage for direct support professionals is \$14.98 or still well below starting wages for Sheetz, McDonald's, Amazon... and the vacancy rate for direct support professional positions was 24.0% (RCPA workforce survey).
- Hospital Emergency Departments are overwhelmed by the increasing number of Pennsylvanians who are presenting with mental health conditions and the decreasing availability of behavioral health services statewide (HAP). Mental health-related ED patients strain hospital resources as these visits take roughly 42% longer than nonpsychiatric visits (WJEM).
- Approximately 5,000 mentally ill persons are arrested per month, straining police resources, and all too often wind up incarcerated in county or state jails — at greater expense to taxpayers and reduced opportunity for good clinical outcomes for the individuals (TAC).
- Due to the chronic lack of adequate funding for county mental health services, providers are closing programs, decreasing capacity, and declining to consider new programs... According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania study (January 2022), residential treatment facility programs in rural Pennsylvania — just like their counterparts in suburban and urban areas — are at capacity with growing wait times to enter treatment.

Alliance of Community Service Providers
Brook Glen Behavioral Hospital
Clarion Psychiatric Center
Community Services Group
Conference of Allegheny Providers (CAP)
Fairmount Behavioral Health System
Family Training and Advocacy Center (FTAC)
Foundations Behavioral Health
Friends Hospital
Horsham Clinic
Keystone Center
Keystone National Alliance for the Mentally III (NAMI)
Lancaster Behavioral Health Hospital
MAX Association
Meadows Psychiatric Center
Mental Health America of Southwestern PA
Mental Health Association of PA (MHA)
Mental Health Partnerships
Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators of Mental Health and Developmental Services (PACA MH/DS)
Pennsylvania 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

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It's past time... For the General Assembly to act on the recommendations of the Behavioral Health Commission. **We respectfully urge the General Assembly to act immediately to release the \$100 million for adult mental health services** in accordance with the Commission's recommendations.

It's now time... For the Commonwealth to create a new forum, with broad-based stakeholder representation, to help develop a shared vision on how to rebuild and enhance county community-based mental health services in the Commonwealth and to help **identify the resources required in the FY 2023/24 budget** to start a multi-year effort towards achieving that vision. **We respectfully urge the General Assembly and Governor to work together to create a new Behavioral Health Commission, to lead the process of formulating a strategic roadmap on mental health services, focused on ensuring access to an agreed-upon set of core mental health services in all counties, building an adequate supply of mental health caregivers, coordination across the continuum of child, adolescent, and adult mental health services, and promoting whole-person care.**

Sincerely,

The Mental Health Safety Net Coalition