

## **Once in a Generation Opportunity to Fund PA's Behavioral Health Services Programs — REVISED 06/08/22**

*With well over 360 members, the majority of who serve over 1 million Pennsylvanians annually, the Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA) is among the largest and most diverse state health and human services trade associations in the nation. RCPA provider members offer mental health, drug and alcohol, intellectual and developmental disabilities, children's, brain injury, medical rehabilitation, and physical disabilities and aging services, through all settings and levels of care. Visit [www.paproviders.org](http://www.paproviders.org) for more information.*

### **RCPA's 2022/23 Budget Recommendations:**

#### **Behavioral Health (BH) Funding — Updated**

RCPA initially requested that the General Assembly release unspent American Rescue Plan (ARP) federal stimulus dollars to help alleviate the workforce crisis behavioral health (BH) providers are facing in recruiting and retaining direct care workers and licensed professionals. This request also highlighted the dire statistics from both national and PA-specific surveys. The bottom line is that there is a significant increase in mental health and crisis service demands, while at the same time there has been a reduction in BH provider service capacity.

Funding needs to be sufficient to continue efforts in better supporting therapists, counselors, case managers, peers, and human services professionals.

In May, RCPA specifically requested the General Assembly release **\$75 million** for BH providers from the ARP funds. Since that request, many deadly events have occurred in the country, and while the vast majority of individuals who are diagnosed with a mental health illness are not violent or never will be violent, a more urgent discussion is necessary to determine the true costs of funding community mental health. While the debate on gun violence is an important one, it should not get in the way of critically-needed mental health funding.

PA legislators have asked, "Is the \$75 million enough to truly and fully fund the system?"

To understand where the \$75 million came from, it is a political number. That is, after discussions with legislators and their staff, it represents a number that can be sold during budget season. While this is not the best way to fund the system, there are always competing interests, and this, in turn, becomes the reality.

It must also be remembered that even *before* the COVID pandemic, RCPA developed a position paper highlighting the crumbling mental health system. Programs were already closing, and staff were leaving the field. Then COVID-19 spread, and the situation only worsened. For a state as large and diverse as PA, a \$75 million investment in mental health funding is a start, but it simply does not address the vast needs the mental health system desperately needs for early detection/intervention.

So what is the "right" number? There is no magic calculation. So much of the system has to be bolstered: traditional outpatient settings, crisis services, in-home and outreach, prevention and early intervention, school-based programs, and more intensive levels of care. This list is substantial, yet every item is critical.

If the General Assembly wants to impact this situation, the number must be significantly higher and needs to be earmarked directly for community providers. RCPA believes that the amount is in the range of **\$250 million**. RCPA stands ready to work with the legislature to determine the best methodology to distribute these dollars to make sure that it goes where it is needed, as well as for direct services.

This is a once in a generation opportunity.

### **County Mental Health Funding**

RCPA also supports an additional **\$36.6 million** increase in county-based mental health services in the 2022/23 budget. The rationale was detailed in the original RCPA budget paper.

To review, the county-based system is needed for critical supports not covered by Medicaid, Medicare, and/or private insurance. This includes crisis services, mental health residential programs, supportive housing, employment services, case management, and psychiatric rehabilitation. Funding these mental health services reduces costlier interventions (e.g., emergency room visits, inpatient care) as well as homelessness and inappropriate incarceration. It is time to fully fund these crucial services.

RCPA requests that the General Assembly help ensure that the above programs are fully funded, and the associated issues fully considered, when negotiating the Commonwealth's 2022/23 Budget. **Contact [Jack Phillips](#), Director of Government Affairs, at 717-599-4372 with questions.**