



## **2017 Policy and Legislative Priorities**

### **Increase Access to Mental Health Care**

All Virginians with mental health issues deserve access to timely, appropriate, affordable services as early as possible. MHA affiliates in Virginia work for expanded access to mental health care for Virginians of all ages – whether they are insured, underinsured, or uninsured – in both the public and private sectors.

- *Eliminate waiting lists through “same day access” throughout the state.* Now in place in only a few localities, streamlined appointment protocols are getting good results. More people are getting services earlier, when their symptoms are treated more effectively, and agencies are using their resources more efficiently.
- *Use incentives to encourage greater mental health coverage by providers of all types, including tele psychiatry, and to integrate health and mental health services in the community.*

### **Provide Appropriate Diversion from the Criminal Justice System**

Too many Virginians who need mental health services are instead arrested and incarcerated in our jails and prisons, often with tragic results. All localities should screen for diversion at the earliest stage of the criminal justice process. For those who are confined, services must be timely, professional and based on individual needs.

- *Support jail diversion for people accused of crimes for whom voluntary mental health or substance use treatment is a reasonable alternative to confinement.*
- *Support increased transparency and a clear process of accountability for the mistreatment of anyone with a mental illness while in local or state custody.*
- *In capital cases when death or life in prison are the sentencing options, exclude from eligibility for the death penalty those who suffer from serious mental illness at the time of their crime.*

### **Expand Peer Support and Peer Run Programs**

Peer support provides a valuable addition to the mental health care delivery system. With quality training a person of lived experience and recovery can assist others in the recovery process. Peer support is recognized as an evidence-based approach to mental health care that reduces crisis relapse and increases successful community engagement. Medicaid has approved a process for reimbursing mental health peer support in 2017.

- *Public and private agencies throughout the continuum of care should include peer support to help improve access and deliver positive outcomes.*
- *Government and private insurance should support services provided by Certified Peer Recovery Specialists in health care, supportive housing, employment, criminal justice and other settings.*

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