



Mental Health Budget Priorities

We call on the General Assembly to support these priority budget amendments

1. Alternative Transportation System for Children and Adults in Mental Health Crisis— (Item 311 #2h Patron: Watts; Item 311 #1s Patron: Hanger; Item 311 #3h Patron: Garrett & Item 303 #4s Patron: Dunnivant)

- In Virginia, children and adults experiencing a mental health crisis are often transported to a mental health facility by law enforcement under a temporary detention order (TDO). During transport, children are frequently handcuffed and sometimes shackled in the back of a police car. This criminalization of children's crises often results in traumatization, stigmatization, and can compromise treatment.
- A recent alternative transportation pilot project in Southwest Virginia demonstrated that adults in mental health crisis can be safely transported to the hospital without the use of law enforcement. This pilot produced positive patient outcome and provided relief to law enforcement.
- Endorsed by law enforcement, mental health advocacy organizations, and was a recommendation from the SJ47 Joint Subcommittee, please support a budget package that builds on the success of the Southwest Virginia pilot and includes funding to develop and implement a statewide, recovery-focused alternative transportation system for individuals under a TDO.

2. STEP-VA: Continue implementation of STEP-VA, the plan for improving statewide community-based mental health services for all ages (Governor's Introduced Budget)

- The Governor's Introduced Budget includes \$7.5 million in general fund dollars to continue implementation of same-day access at the remaining community services boards (CSBs) and \$3.7 million in general fund dollars in the first year and 7.4 million in general fund dollars in the second year to implement primary care screening.
- Over the past several years, Virginia has made significant improvements in the quality and accountability of community mental health services through legislative efforts. However, Virginia's overall behavioral health system remains underfunded, fragmented, and uncoordinated.
- STEP-VA is a roadmap for how Virginia will transform its behavioral health system. It aims to ensure that every community has the capacity to provide integrated behavioral health services for both children and adults.
- In 2017, Gov. McAuliffe and the General Assembly signaled their commitment to STEP-VA by providing \$4.9 million in general fund dollars to implement same-day access to mental health services at 18 of the 40 community services boards (CSBs). The governor's and General Assembly's funding support of STEP-VA is a first step in translating the vision of a reformed behavioral health system into reality.
- **Please support a budget package that implements the next phase of STEP-VA by fully funding same-day access and primary-care-screening services at all 40 CSBs.**

3. Medicaid Expansion

Since 2014, Virginia legislators have rejected the opportunity to provide affordable health insurance to hardworking Virginians. With expanded Medicaid, nearly 400,000 low-income Virginia adults could gain coverage. Most of these individuals are in a health coverage “gap”. They are uninsured and ineligible for existing health insurance programs. The new coverage would be largely supported with federal funds from the Affordable Care Act, paying 94% of the cost in 2018 and reducing to 90% in 2020 and after.

By closing the gap, Virginia could save state dollars and improve the delivery of mental health and substance use disorder services.

- Adults – including transition age youth who are 19 and 20 years old, the age when many mental illnesses begin – would benefit greatly by having health insurance to provide access to needed treatment for their mental health needs.
- In an attempt to address the opioid crisis, Virginia has developed an impressive array of Medicaid benefits (ARTS) to treat those with substance use disorders, but few adults who are addicted to substances can access that treatment because so few currently are eligible for Medicaid.
- Virginia is in the process of transforming its entire behavioral health system – through the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the 40 community services boards (CSBs) – to provide a consistent array of high quality services in all areas of the state through its [STEP-VA plan](#). Without the significant infusion of federal Medicaid dollars through expansion, however, it will take many years to implement STEP-VA. Meanwhile, Virginians – both adults AND children – will continue to lack access to critical behavioral health services because Virginia does not have adequate general fund dollars to build out the necessary array of services.

By improving Medicaid coverage, each month Virginia could save \$5.7 million in state dollars now spent on hospital indigent care, mental health services, family planning and other state-funded health programs. Those savings would offset new costs, resulting in an **official NET state-savings estimate of \$138 million in general funds during fiscal years 2019 and 2020.**

4. Increase Permanent Supportive Housing (*Item 312 #6h Patron: Levine and Gooditis*)

- The budget amendment would increase funding for Permanent Supportive Housing by \$1.5 million dollars in 2019 and \$2.9 million in 2020.
- Permanent Supportive Housing is an evidence-based housing practice for adults with serious mental illness (SMI) that has been implemented, refined, and studied for more than 30 years. It provides housing to individuals with SMI in Virginia who otherwise might experience homelessness and poor behavioral health, resulting in high use of costly hospital, shelter, and criminal justice resources.
- Permanent Supportive Housing works because of a combination of providing access to affordable and safe housing, long term rental assistance, and wrap-around supportive services to keep people with SMI stably housed and healthy.
- In Virginia, the average success rate of Permanent Supportive Housing participants not returning to homelessness after entering Permanent Supportive Housing is between 85% and 100%—many of these individuals may have experienced long term homelessness prior to receiving the service.
- Increasing an investment in Permanent Supportive Housing now may result in even more cost avoidance in the short, intermediate, and long term future for our criminal justice, state psychiatric, homelessness, and medical care systems.