



2019 Policy and Legislative Priorities

Increase Access to Community Based Mental Health Care

All Virginians with mental health issues deserve access to community-based care that is person-centered, trauma-informed, evidence-based, timely, affordable, and delivered as early as possible.

- *Recognizing that “Housing is Health Care,” support efforts to ensure that all Virginians with mental health needs have safe and stable housing, including eviction prevention initiatives.*
- *Support the work of the joint DBHDS/DMAS Community Mental Health Service System Redesign Taskforce and other efforts to develop a full continuum of person-centered, trauma-informed community services across the Commonwealth.*

Address the Needs of People with Mental Health Challenges in the Criminal Justice System

Many Virginians who need mental health services are instead arrested and incarcerated. 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 the development of mental health dockets across the state for misdemeanor and felony defendants with a mental illness. Remove the eligibility requirement that a formal clinical diagnosis of mental illness must have occurred prior to the date of the offense.*
- *Support establishing minimum standards for mental health care in local and regional jails.*
- *Support appropriate use of the Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity defense.*
- *In capital cases when death or life in prison are the sentencing options, exclude from eligibility for the death penalty those who suffer from severe mental illness at the time of their crime.*

Expand Opportunities for Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists

Peer support is an evidence-based service that reduces crisis relapse and increases community engagement.

- *Encourage public and private agencies throughout the continuum of care to include peer support.*
- *Encourage third-party reimbursement of services provided by Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists in health care, supportive housing, employment, criminal justice and other settings.*
- *Require a minimum wage of \$15/hour for Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists.*

Endorse effective strategies for reducing suicide

Every eight hours a Virginian dies by suicide, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among Virginians 15-34 years of age.

- *Support efforts to restrict access to lethal means.*
- *Encourage the development and adoption of responsible media guidelines for articles related to suicide.*
- *Encourage primary care physicians to include depression and suicide risk screening as part of every patient contact.*

MHA of Augusta
MHA Fauquier County
MHA of Roanoke Valley

Partner for Mental Health (Charlottesville)
MHA of Fredericksburg

Hanover MHA
MHA Warren County
MHA of Virginia