

# 2021 County Government Priorities

## Increased Funding for Community-based Mental Health Services

The commonwealth and its county partners must work together to fully support the needs of our citizens and our communities that are impacted by mental illness, substance disorder and developmental disabilities.



Maintaining mental health is a crucial part of wellbeing and county-based community mental health programs play a vital role in supporting a healthy society. Counties are required to provide certain services including crisis intervention, support for individuals leaving state facilities, treatment, community consultation and education, day services and prevention.

Community-based mental health services—such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care and crisis intervention—are critical to the well-being of our constituents and our communities. Funding levels for county mental health services have direct impacts on whether these important community and family supports will be available. Yet for too many years, state funding for mental health services has lagged far behind needs, as counties must often advocate to simply protect funding, much less achieve the increases needed to catch up from years of underfunding.

While need has exceeded funding for years, the unique set of stressors brought on by the COVID-19 public health emergency deeply exacerbated the existing problem, including isolation, economic and physical health concerns, and more. The pandemic will certainly impact the already-strained web of human services programming that makes up the fabric of our community safety net.

Furthermore, there is a recurring threat to eliminate the successful Behavioral HealthChoices program, which would disrupt care and treatment for tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians and increase the cost of services. For the past 20 years, Behavioral HealthChoices has allowed each county the flexibility to deliver mental health and drug and alcohol services to individuals enrolled in Medicaid. Counties have been able to coordinate and invest in programs and services that meet local needs, and clients have been highly satisfied with these local services.

Close collaboration between the legislature, administration and counties is critical to addressing the entire mental health system. This includes increasing mental health base funds for expanded services, beds and diversions, as well as abandoning efforts to dismantle Behavioral HealthChoices, which has provided important behavioral health services to some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable community members.

### COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Commitment to full and sustainable state and federal funding for behavioral health services at a level that responds to societal and economy-driven increases in caseloads.
- Prioritizing the state-county partnership in service delivery to continue efforts to integrate services.
- Long-term investment in the mental health base to help counties ensure that the existing safety net of services is strong and sustainable, prior to adding additional programs and services.
- Preserving the Behavioral HealthChoices program so counties can continue providing local mental health services in the most effective way possible.

For more information on **increased funding for community-based mental health services**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org).



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