



# County Mental Health Funding Increase – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

County mental health base funds serve as the primary source of state support for community mental health services in Pennsylvania. These funds help counties provide a broad range of locally driven services, including community education, prevention initiatives, early intervention, and programs tailored to address unique regional needs. Base funding is especially critical for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured and might otherwise face significant barriers to accessing mental health care and support services.

## What Is County Mental Health Base Funding?

- County mental health base funding consists of direct allocations from the state budget administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.
- Act 80 of 2012 established the Human Services Block Grant Program to provide participating counties with greater flexibility in delivering locally identified human services. The program allows counties to align resources with community needs and improve service coordination across systems.
- While the block grant includes several human services line items, it represents only a portion of the total funding counties receive to support human services programs.
- County mental health systems rely on a combination of funding streams to ensure services remain accessible, comprehensive, and responsive to community needs. In addition to state base funding, counties support mental health services through:
  - Medical Assistance reimbursements
  - Behavioral HealthChoices funding
  - Federal grants
  - County matching funds
  - Local funding and investments

## How Do Counties Use Mental Health Base Funding?

- Counties use mental health funding to provide community-based treatment and support services, including outpatient counseling, case management, psychiatric services, and crisis intervention.
- Support crisis response systems, such as mobile crisis teams, walk-in crisis centers, and coordination with 988 and emergency services to stabilize individuals experiencing behavioral health emergencies.
- Funding services for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured, ensuring access to treatment and supports when other coverage options are unavailable.
- Provide housing and community supports, including supportive housing programs, residential services, and assistance designed to help individuals live safely and independently in the community.

- Coordinate and manage services for individuals with serious and persistent mental illness, including recovery supports, peer services, employment assistance, and life-skills programming.
- Support children and youth behavioral health services, including school-based coordination, family supports, and early childhood mental health initiatives.

### **What was the Impact of the \$40 million Increase Counties Received in FY 2023-2024 and FY 2024-2025?**

In FY 2023–2024 and FY 2024–2025, counties in Pennsylvania received a combined \$40 million increase in county mental health base funding--the first funding increases in more than 15 years. Counties used these investments to stabilize critical services, respond to growing demand, and strengthen community-based behavioral health supports. Investments supported:

- Established and expanded targeted community-based programs, including mental health respite care, anger management services, parenting programs, and independent living supports designed to prevent crises and promote long-term stability.
- Expanded Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) in schools, increasing access to early identification, counseling, and coordinated behavioral health services for students.
- Increased availability of Mobile Psychiatric Rehabilitation (MPR) services, allowing providers to reach more individuals directly in homes and communities.
- Expanded Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) programs, connecting individuals in recovery with trained peers who provide mentorship and recovery support.
- Strengthened housing and residential supports, including Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) programs, supported living programs, improvements to personal care homes, and expanded community-supported housing initiatives.
- Bolstered crisis response systems, including expanded county crisis intervention services, walk-in crisis supports, and provider capacity to respond to behavioral health emergencies.
- Stabilized existing services amid rising demand and workforce shortages, enabling counties across Pennsylvania to maintain provider networks and prevent service reductions, though many reported limited ability to significantly expand services beyond current needs.

### **What Would Counties Do with an Increase in Funding?**

Additional investment would allow counties to reduce system pressures, shorten wait times for services, which some counties report range from 6–12 months, and strengthen community-based behavioral health supports. Counties indicated funding would be used to:

- Rebuild community mental health infrastructure
  - Expand mobile treatment services and Assertive Community Treatment teams.
  - Strengthen peer support and recovery programs.
- Expand and strengthen crisis response services
  - Increase mobile crisis capacity and crisis prevention services.
  - Establish or enhance behavioral health crisis walk-in centers.
- Support justice-involved individuals
  - Expand in-jail mental health services.

- Improve reentry supports, uninsured services, and recidivism prevention programs.
- Increase youth behavioral health services
  - Expand Student Assistance Programs in schools.
  - Increase access to school-based therapy and summer youth programming.
- Address workforce recruitment and retention challenges
  - Increase provider reimbursement rates.
  - Improve wages for direct support professionals and frontline staff.
- Expand housing and residential treatment capacity
  - Strengthen supportive housing and residential service programs.
  - Develop new housing initiatives and add additional residential beds.

### **Why is Funding Mental Health Crisis Services Critical Right Now?**

- County-operated crisis systems serve as the front line of response, ensuring individuals experiencing a mental health emergency can access help quickly and safely.
- County walk-in crisis centers provide a critical alternative to emergency rooms and law enforcement by offering immediate assessment, stabilization, and connection to ongoing care in a clinical setting.
- Timely crisis intervention helps prevent situations from escalating, reducing hospitalizations, emergency room utilization, and unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Sustained investment in crisis services allows counties to maintain and expand the infrastructure needed to meet growing demand and ensure that every Pennsylvanian can access lifesaving support when it matters most.

### **What Happens if there is Minimal to No Increase in County Mental Health Funding?**

- Counties will struggle to maintain essential mental health services. Continued increases in demand without meaningful funding growth are pushing local systems beyond sustainable limits.
- The community safety net will continue to erode. Prevention services, crisis response, and community-based supports funded through county mental health dollars will face reduced capacity and availability.
- Pressure on jails and emergency departments will intensify. Without timely access to treatment, more individuals with untreated behavioral health needs will rely on emergency rooms or enter the criminal justice system.
- Provider and workforce shortages will deepen. Ongoing financial strain will accelerate staff turnover and provider loss, driving longer wait times across the Commonwealth.
- Access to care will decline for all Pennsylvanians. Limited provider capacity will result in service delays regardless of insurance coverage.
- Fragmented investments will further strain the system. Disproportionate funding approaches stretch already limited workforce and provider resources, reducing overall service capacity.

### **Why Does This Matter Now?**

- Demand for services is rapidly outpacing system capacity. Communities across Pennsylvania are experiencing growing gaps between behavioral health needs and available providers and programs.
- The impacts are already visible across critical systems. Emergency departments are seeing longer wait times as individuals seek care with nowhere else to turn; students are struggling to access appropriate services, placing added strain on schools and children and youth systems; and law enforcement officers are responding to an increasing number of behavioral health crisis calls. Suicide rates have also risen, underscoring the urgency of action.
- Investing in community-based mental health services strengthens entire communities. Supporting these services improves outcomes for children and families, reduces pressure on first responders and hospitals, supports local governments, and promotes healthier, safer communities overall.