



CCAP Complex Case Workgroup Executive Summary

February 2024

As a part of the 2023 County Government Priorities process, CCAP members voted to “address the needs of children and youth who have complex behavioral health issues.” In March of 2023, the Association Board established the Complex Case Work Group to develop a report and recommendations. The goal of this report is to establish practical and immediate strategies to protect our most vulnerable children and youth.

What are complex cases?

Minors who are in the custody of the county for whom there is not a level of care sufficient to meet their mental, behavioral, or physical needs. This includes dependent and/or delinquent youth for whom there is not an appropriate level of care available, such as those sleeping in a Children and Youth Services office or hotel. This also includes those for whom a higher level of care is recommended, but for whom that level of care cannot be located, is unavailable, or simply does not exist.

Current Landscape

For the period January 1, 2023, until June 30, 2023, 45 counties were able to provide data on the number of youth forced to sleep somewhere other than a licensed child placement facility. This may be the child welfare office, a hotel, or a hospital ready for discharge, but there is no facility to which they can be moved. This includes youth placed in a lower level of care than needed.

- 255 youth slept somewhere other than a licensed placement facility.
 - 772 nights sleeping in offices, hotels, cottages, and hospitals
- 175 youth were forced to stay in a hospital beyond their discharge date.
 - At least 2,651 nights unnecessarily spent in the hospital.
- 99 youth did not receive mental health services needed because the hospital could not provide the level of care and simply discharged them.
- 284 youth who were placed in a lower level of care than what was recommended
 - 3,161 nights during which youth were in a lower level of care than needed.
- 33 youth placed outside of Pennsylvania when in state placements couldn't be located

Negative Outcomes for Children, Youth, and Staff

Nationwide, there have been numerous examples of disastrous outcomes when child welfare agencies are forced to house youth in offices and hotels. Texas has seen numerous sexual and physical assaults of staff. Another youth was struck and killed by a car after absconding from the child welfare office where she had been staying.

Such placements do not provide for the proper age separation of youth. New Mexico saw an older youth sexually assault a 10-year-old when they were both staying at the child welfare office. Los Angeles had a 16-year-old youth placed at a hotel for lack of an appropriate placement sexually and physically assaulted a child welfare worker providing supervision.

Recommendations

State development of a no eject/no reject program to ensure youth have a safe place to stay when there are no other options. When a county agency is unable to locate an appropriate placement for a child in their custody, those agencies may sometimes be forced into having youth sleep in hotels or county agency building, while being cared for by child welfare staff. It is imperative that there be a program developed that will ensure that youth no longer are forced to stay in these inappropriate and unlicensed placement settings. While there are such programs in the delinquency system, there is no such equivalent for dependent youth.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties/Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations*

More organized and concerted efforts be made to develop programs to accept challenging behaviors, co-occurring medical and mental health issues, and other patterns of diagnosis which are proving to be the most challenging to finding appropriate placements.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties/Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations*

Collaborative cross-systems trainings to allow county teams and state personnel who address complex cases to better understand the available resources and limits for different funding streams, how to leverage existing services, and to identify areas in need of further service development.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties*

Regulatory and policy changes to enable existing funding streams to better address complex cases. There is a need to establish a group who has the authority to approve the use of their respective funding streams in order to expedite the arrangement of services and funding for youth needing the services. The state Medical Assistance plan should be modified to allow for more levels of service, such as weekend treatment facilities, evening programming, and expanded respite care.

Responsible party: *State*

State and counties leverage technology to free staff time and improve outcomes by allowing staff to spend more time working with families. The state should purchase or develop a FirstMatch-type program to enable a single referral and an improved identification of program matches for all available placement resources statewide.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties*

Greater emphasis on improving state, county, and private staffing throughout child welfare in the state in order to build a strong and resilient workforce capable of meeting the needs of children and families in the state.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties/Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations*

Develop a Pennsylvania mental health resource navigation system to assist families locating needed services and navigating the mental health system, such as the KinConnector resource.

Responsible parties: *State/Counties/Behavioral Health Managed Care Organizations*