



Adequate County Mental Health Funding

Counties deliver critical mental health services – such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care, and crisis intervention – on behalf of the state. These services must be properly funded to ensure that county residents can access the care that they need. The lack of adequate state funding has failed to keep up with demand. Coupled with growing caseloads and cost inflation, the community mental health system has been pushed to the point of collapse.

Counties currently administer direct services to support their community's mental health system. Thanks to the flexibility of the county mental health base funding allocated by the state, counties have been able to continue to serve their residents but are stretching ever more limited state funding to its breaking point. With additional state funding for the county mental health base, counties would be able to address specific needs in more meaningful and impactful ways, such as child and older adult mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer supports, and other diversion services. **If the commonwealth cannot commit to long-term, sustainable funding for mental health services, residents will continue to suffer as it becomes harder and takes longer to find the support they need.** Additionally, the impacts of underfunding trickle down to more costly systems, including hospitals, law enforcement, and corrections.



THE FACTS

- Capacity within the currently available services is inadequate to meet the need in communities. **Community members frequently report wait times of at least 6 months, often much longer.** Stabilization of these existing services, like addressing workforce gaps, is a critical first step.
- Counties estimate the need for the community-based system is an additional \$1.2 billion to bolster, rebuild, and add programs that adequately meet community needs.
- One-time funding for mental health initiatives can be helpful in limited circumstances, but long-term programs cannot be developed without sustainable, dependable long-term funding plans.
- Without sustainability, counties cannot plan or stand-up long-term services**, which can result in unspent funds despite the critically high need for community-based services.
- Mental health-based funds allow counties flexibility to meet unmet needs which vary by community, including community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care, and crisis intervention.
- The unmet community need has created a growing population of individuals that become involved with emergency departments, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system. **When no appropriate diversion exists, the remaining solutions are hospitals or incarceration**, both of which are not appropriate settings for mental health treatment and are more costly.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- A \$40 million increase** in the state's mental health community-based system to help counties maintain and rebuild the existing safety net of services, before adding other additional programs and services needed by the community.
- A continued, substantial investment of state dollars to rebuild and strengthen community crisis services, residential mental health programs, and other locally provided care that will stabilize mental health services and assist hospitals with capacity concerns.
- Maintaining local flexibility and preserving programs, such as the Behavioral HealthChoices program, so that counties can continue to provide local mental health services effectively.
- Ensuring that counties have a voice in all efforts to address behavioral health needs in the commonwealth.

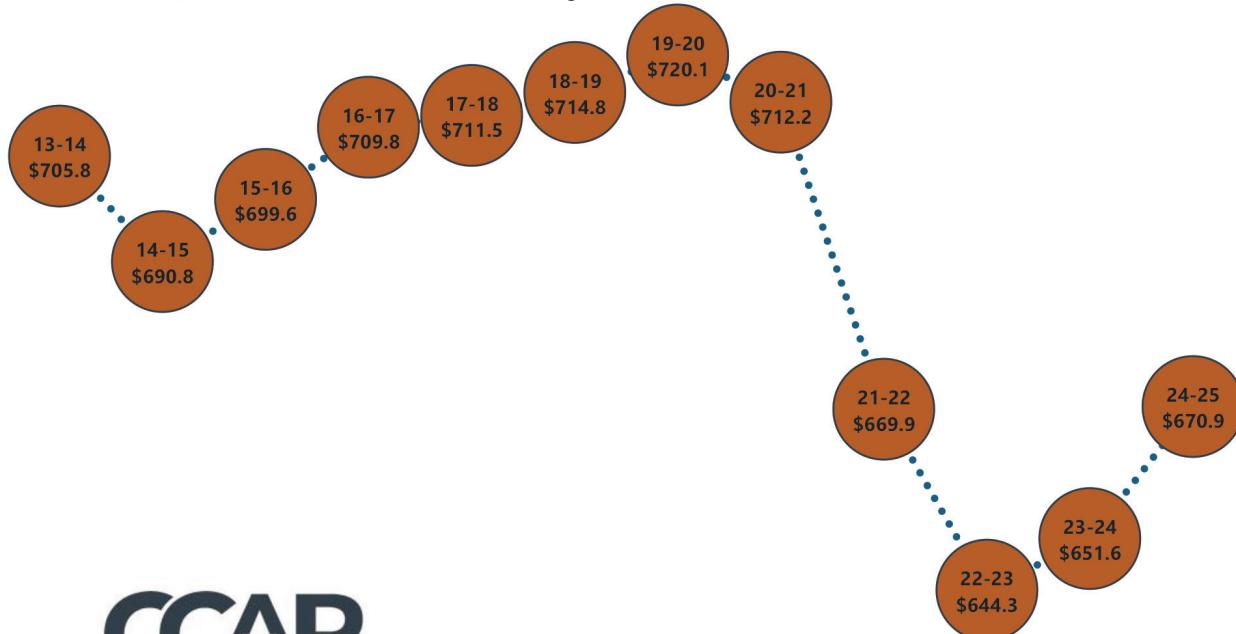
THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would expand access to timely, appropriate mental health care across the Commonwealth, ensuring services are available locally and without undue burden on individuals or families.

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Inflation Adjusted State Expenditures for County MH Services, 2013-14 to 2024-25

(\$ Millions, Inflation adjusted with June 2024 = 100)



Data source: Governor's Budget Office, PennWATCH

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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