

Building Out Ohio's Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Care

Background

Since taking office, Governor DeWine has been an outspoken and relentless advocate for mental health prevention, treatment and recovery, making it a top policy priority. While Ohio has made great improvements in caring for people with mental illness and substance use disorders, there is much more to do to strengthen the continuum of services for Ohioans in their communities as well as support access to acute care settings when a higher level of care is needed.

As it stands, many Ohioans in need of treatment have challenges accessing it in their communities. Today, half of Ohio's counties are designated as mental health professional shortage areas, impacting approximately 4.9 million Ohioans. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, community mental health and substance use treatment providers struggled to hire and retain staff, and like other sectors of healthcare this has been exacerbated by recent economic and workforce trends. Some providers have reported staff turnover rates as great as 40%, citing low wages as the reason staff are leaving to work in non-health care related fields. Additionally, some residential treatment providers can only staff 50-75% of their beds. This lack of capacity is particularly problematic for children and youth who require intensive mental health treatment. With nearly a third of Ohio Medicaid's adult population and about twenty five percent of children having a behavioral health diagnosis, the time is now to make the change.

Policy Proposal

To maintain and increase capacity for critical mental health and substance use care, ODM, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), proposes to:

- Increase rates for key community treatment services, investing a total of \$220M, or approximately a **10% increase over the biennium**. Increased rates will support raises in wages for practitioners working in community mental health and substance use disorder treatment settings. These services are focused on intervening early and supporting long-term recovery so that Ohioans receiving these services can get well and fully participate in Ohio's communities and economy.

- Introduce a new **mental health peer recovery support service** and invest \$30M in the new service over the biennium. Certified peer recovery supporters are individuals with lived or shared experience of mental health or substance use challenges. They provide support to educate, advocate, mentor and motivate their clients. Peer support is currently available for those with substance use disorder (SUD) and as a part of several evidenced-based practices. This new service will expand coverage for individuals with mental health needs. Mental health peer supporters play a key role in crisis response and are essential to the comprehensive crisis development work that OhioMHAS is leading. Further, leveraging mental health peer recovery supporters across the continuum of care will increase opportunities for this group of individuals in the behavioral health workforce.
- Increase rates for freestanding psychiatric hospitals and acute psychiatric units of hospitals to respond to the high demand for inpatient services and the more intense needs of individuals with serious mental illnesses. This 6% targeted increase is expected to cost \$130.1M (all funds) over the biennium. This funding for psychiatric hospital services is funded with a combination of GRF and non-GRF.

Conclusion

ODM's budget proposal to enhance mental health and substance use disorder care recognizes the significant role of the behavioral health workforce across the continuum of care. The combination with rate increases and the expansion of Medicaid coverage for mental health peer support will improve access to behavioral healthcare to meet the needs of many youth and adults in Ohio. With these investments, behavioral health workers across the state will be supported further in caring for people living with mental illness or substance use disorders to achieve and maintain wellness and live productive lives.