



Emergence Health Network

Legislative Priorities for the 88th Texas Legislative Session

OVERVIEW

- Promote opportunities to improve access to integrated care, retain local control of resources and important community decisions related to public intellectual and developmental disability, mental health, and substance use disorder services.
- Explore, monitor and promote options to expand access to essential community-based services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, serious mental illness and substance use disorders.
- Seek solutions for investing in the mental health professional workforce in order to meet the rising needs of intellectual and development disability, mental health, and substance use disorder services in El Paso County and across the state.

BUDGET

1. Support expansion of behavioral health services and funding for children and adults, including outpatient services, crisis intervention, and specialized programming.
2. Support continued funding for behavioral health grant programs created by SB 55 (84R), SB 292 (85R), and HB 13(85R), as well as any other grant programs that fund behavioral health or IDD.
3. Support a statewide rate increase to include the Direct Payment Program and the Public Health Plans-Charity Care Pool to compensate behavioral health professionals at competitive wages to address staffing shortages
4. Ensure equitable and sustainable provider rates that aligns service capacity with Texas' continually increasing population and cover the true cost of delivering quality care across mental health, intellectual & developmental disability (IDD), and substance use disorder (SUD) systems.
5. Support legislative and budgetary solutions to offer provider incentives for mental health professionals, including loan repayment assistance, to direct students into those career fields and attract out-of-state professionals.

INTEGRATED CARE

1. Support incentives for providers who integrate primary care, SUD, and mental health services. Support legislation that facilitates credentialing and requires payors to offer integrated contracts for primary care and behavioral health services providers.
2. Support greater coordination between OSAR, state-funded mental health services, and state-funded chemical-dependency services.
3. Promote access to integrated care while retaining local control of resources and essential community decisions related to IDD, mental health, and SUD treatment mainly provided alongside primary care.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

1. Ensure continued funding for the Charity Care Pool (CCP) and Public Health Plan (PHP) that allows Texas healthcare providers to continue to serve individuals and protect successful programming.
2. Support and fully fund behavioral health disaster preparedness initiatives so local communities can respond with comprehensive programming, including victim services, first responder support, and community-wide awareness and education.
3. Support legislation that would exempt Local Mental Health Authorities who obtain Joint Commission accreditation from utilizing the Clinical Management for Behavioral Health Services (CMBHS) state reporting system if all reporting requirements are met. Joint Commission quality standards exceed those of CMBHS.
4. Ensure continued support for designated Texas 988 call centers to include funding for recruitment and retention, equipment and technology, employee training, and community education and marketing to provide high-quality services 24/7, 365 days a year.

IDD SERVICES

1. Support innovation and best-practice implementation of vocational training strategies recommended by the SB 2027 (85R) and SB 2038 (86R) studies, which included a match grant program to help nonprofit and or/governmental entities implement vocational training programming.

2. Support a study of the HCS waiting list and strategies for reducing the waiting list and require agency-level expertise in meeting the needs of individuals on the waiting list.
3. Support IDD system redesign that promotes the vital LIDDA role and viable provider system: comprehensive targeted case management; oversight to ensure individual choice, quality, and well-being; specialized program and clinical expertise; and crisis intervention and stabilization.
4. Support additional mental health treatment, trauma-informed care, positive behavior supports, and training for families and staff to strengthen the capacity of community-based IDD services.
5. Support system improvements that enhance LIDDAs' ability to meet the needs of individuals with IDD who also have a co-occurring substance use disorder or mental health diagnosis.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES

1. Support expansion of pre-arrest and post-arrest diversion of individuals experiencing mental illness from county jails. Support establishment of crisis-intervention treatment centers to facilitate diversion.
2. Support expanded use of outpatient competency restoration and other solutions that will reduce strain on the availability of beds for forensic referrals.
3. Support the expansion of mental health and SUD courts, including treatment programs that reduce criminal penalties for individuals facing nonviolent charges involving small-amount marijuana possession.

MILITARY ISSUES

1. Support the expansion of veterans' courts and the Military Veterans Peer Network.
2. Enhance state support of LMHA-operated Veteran One-Stop Resource Centers.
3. Support legislation allowing MHFA training provided to Texas veterans and active-duty personnel reimbursement at the agency level through the existing DSHS grant or the Texas Veterans Commission.

4. Support efforts to allow active-duty personnel to access mental health services with authorized providers outside of the Department of Defense to increase capacity, reduce wait times, and reduce the suicide rate among military service members.

ACCESS TO CARE

1. Support continued expansion of telemedicine in Texas, primarily where behavioral health services can be provided more directly in school-based settings and behavioral health expertise can be accessed in emergency rooms.
2. Support efforts to shorten the processing time for licensure approvals for behavioral health providers, including Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Master Social Workers.
3. Promote a super-utilizer waiver that allows providers to serve without cumbersome secondary authorizations like those found in the Youth Empowerment Services Waiver.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

1. Support efforts to enhance school-based mental health services to include provisional clinical services as well as staff and parent training and outreach.
2. Ensure that funding secured for Multisystemic Therapy teams is appropriated to Local Mental Health Authorities for them to establish and administer this evidence-based program.
3. Support phased-in requirement for all Texas-licensed teachers to undergo Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. These efforts would include financial support to contract substitute teachers for class coverage.
4. Ensure school counseling personnel receive appropriate crisis training and licensure before applying clinical interventions.
5. Expand education about suicide prevention into middle- and high-school settings.