



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

for the
89TH TEXAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

OVERVIEW

- Advocate for and highlight the critical role of the Local Mental Health Authority and Local Intellectual Developmental Authority in providing essential community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, serious mental illness, and substance use disorders.
- Seek solutions to invest in mental health professional workforce to meet the growing needs of El Paso County and across Texas.
- Expanding and funding behavioral health services, maintaining essential grant programs, and ensuring equitable provider rates.

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 that includes the Direct Payment Program and the Public Health Provider-Charity Care Pool (PHP-CCP). This measure will ensure competitive wages for behavioral health professionals, addressing staffing shortages, and will provide ongoing funding for the PHP-CCP. Such support will enable Texas healthcare providers to maintain their capacity to serve individuals and sustain successful programs.
4. Ensure equitable and sustainable provider rates that align service capacity with Texas' continually increasing population and cover the true cost of delivering quality care across mental health, intellectual & developmental disability (IDD), primary care, and substance use disorder (SUD) systems to hire and retain high quality professionals.
5. Support continued funding for Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA) that allows Local Mental Health Authorities to provide training to a wider range of persons as designated by HB 2059 (89R).

WORKFORCE

1. Support the increase of community-based IDD direct care worker wages to competitive levels. Currently, community IDD-DCWs earn \$10.60/hour. The current wage hampers community providers' ability to attract and retain qualified staff, exacerbating the workforce crisis in community-based IDD services.
2. Support legislation that will establish reimbursement for Licensed Professional Counselor Associates, Licensed Master Social Workers, and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associates to address mental health provider shortages as well as retain and employ clinicians with proper supervision.
3. Support efforts to shorten the processing time for licensure approvals for behavioral health providers, including Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers.



INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY SERVICES

1. Support a study of the HCS interest list and identify strategies for reducing the waiting periods.
2. 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.
3. Support higher education programs that provide inclusive services for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, enhancing their educational experience and preparing them for the workforce.
4. Support grant programs to help nonprofits and/or governmental entities implement vocational training programming.
5. Support system improvements that enhance LIDDA's ability to meet the needs of individuals with IDD who also have co-occurring substance use disorder or mental health diagnosis, including providing specialized crisis services.



CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

1. Support efforts to enhance school-based mental health services to include training and outreach for staff, parents, and students.
2. Ensure school counseling personnel receive appropriate crisis training and licensure before applying clinical interventions.
3. Support access to care and services for children that will support family preservation and prevent them from entering the child welfare system.



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACCESS

1. 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.
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 greater coordination between OSAR, state-funded mental health services, and state-funded chemical-dependency services to enhance communication and ensure seamless continuity of care.
4. Support regional health information exchange of clinical data to enhance patient care quality and enable community-level analytics.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE

1. Support expansion of pre-arrest and post-arrest diversion of individuals experiencing mental illness from county jails.
2. Support continued funding and growth of crisis-intervention treatment centers to facilitate diversion.
3. Support expanded use of outpatient competency restoration, jail-based competency restoration and other solutions that will reduce strain on the availability of inpatient beds for forensic referrals.
4. 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

1. Support the expansion of mental health services provided through Texas Veteran Commission's Military Veteran Peer Network, including certified peer service coordinators who offer mental health services, to service members, veterans, and their families.
2. Support legislation that lowers the matching funds requirement for grant programs that support community mental health programs for veterans and their families, such as the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance (TV+FA) Grant Program.
3. Support efforts to allow active-duty personnel to access mental health services with authorized providers outside of the Department of Defense to increase provider capacity, reduce wait times, and reduce the suicide rate among military service members.
4. Support expansion of veteran treatment courts and reducing recidivism among veterans who have been charged with certain types of offenses by providing them support and rehabilitation through comprehensive substance abuse and/or mental health treatment.