



County Mental Health Funding Increase – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Counties, as the providers of community-based mental health services, are seeing demands for mental health services in communities that far exceed state funding levels. Over the past decade, counties have continued to advocate for increased funding for county mental health services. In addition to the recently released report, [County Mental Health Services Survey Finding and Report](#), counties have pulled together answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about this critical state budget request.

What is county mental health funding?

- Simply put, it's community mental health for education, prevention, and service provision - the foundation of the mental health system, which is critical to support other investments like school-based services and crisis.
- These funds are flexible and can be used by a county to fit their local community needs.
- Examples of programs that only county mental health funds can pay for include student assistance programs in schools, respite, hotlines, prevention, community education and outreach, employment supports and other programs not covered under insurance plans.

What are counties asking for?

- Counties are seeking a **\$250 million increase** in the FY 2024-2025 state budget for county mental health services, separate from other state investments in mental health services.
- While \$250 million is a significant investment, a recent survey of counties estimates community-based mental health service needs at an additional \$1.6 billion in funding.
- Counties are advocating for a long-term commitment of further increases over the next five to ten years that can develop a strong system across Pennsylvania.
- With limited workforce and resources, \$250 million would allow for initial rebuilding and development of new workforce and programs, allowing for future annual increases to adequately provide the level of service needed throughout communities.

Why is a comprehensive funding investment important?

- Counties want coordinated, holistic investments that do not further silo the system as counties continue to compete for limited funding, resources and workforce for mental health.
- During several legislative hearings, including the House Education Committee hearing on student mental health earlier this year, counselors and mental health professionals cited the need for investments in prevention and the larger overall base to provide for whole-family mental health and broader community-based prevention services.
- County funding will ensure any other investments we make, including school or crisis-based services, are not made in silos and can be supported by the broader overall mental health services continuum.

What was the impact of the \$20 million increase counties received in FY 2023-2024?

- In the FY 2023-2024 budget, counties received an increase of \$20 million, which was the first increase in 15 years for county mental health funding.
- While this investment was significant, few counties reported being able to do little more than keep up with their existing programming and maintain status quo, let alone offer new or expanded services to continue supporting those in need.

What would counties do with the \$250 million?

- Decrease pressures on other parts of the system, including schools, law enforcement, jails, hospitals and emergency departments.
- Counties have reported significant wait times for services, some ranging 6-12 months.
- When asked, counties [noted](#) they would:
 - Rebuild the "infrastructure" of community services and programs
 - Add and bolster crisis services
 - Address justice-involved populations
 - Serve youth
 - Address staff recruitment and retention (county and providers)
 - Bolster supportive housing programs, including transitional age youth housing
- This funding will help counties to ensure that the safety net of services already in place is strong and sustainable, especially in this time when so much else is uncertain.

What happens if there is minimal to no increase in county mental health funding?

- Counties have continued their obligations to their communities for mental health services despite the lack of funding, but they cannot hold on much longer.
- With the rapidly rising demands for services, counties cannot continue to sustain the social services safety net, comprised of programs and services these dollars pay for.
- Jail admissions where individuals suffer from untreated behavioral health conditions will continue to increase, and emergency rooms will continue to fill with individuals seeking mental health services.
- The provider and workforce network will continue to dwindle, further expanding wait times for all Pennsylvanians, regardless of their MA or private insurance status.
- Continued division of the system through disproportionate investments will further strain our already limited workforce and resources, limiting care and service capacity.

Why does this matter now?

- Service demand far outweighs capacity.
- This is being actualized in increased emergency department wait times as individuals seek treatment without knowing where else to go, students are having trouble accessing appropriate services, creating issues within our schools and children and youth systems, law enforcement is being called to respond to more crisis calls and suicide rates have tragically increased.
- An investment in community-based mental health services is an investment in Pennsylvania's communities, children and families, our first responders, local governments, medical providers and overall wellbeing.