



September 7, 2022

Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health  
Health & Welfare Building Room 327  
625 Forster Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

**RE: CCAP Recommendations to the Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health**

Dear Members of the Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health:

I am writing today on behalf of Pennsylvania's 67 counties to request your consideration and inclusion of our recommendations that the Behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health will submit in its upcoming report to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Counties, who have primary responsibility for coordinating the community mental health safety net, have been requesting increased and sustainable state funding for community-based mental health services for over a decade to address the growing mental health crisis in Pennsylvania. In fact, counties selected appropriate funding to support the crumbling mental health system as our top legislative priority for 2022.

Despite intense advocacy efforts with other community stakeholders who recognize the impacts to our residents because of this dire lack of funding, we are frustrated and discouraged that the critically needed \$36.6 million increase we requested for mental health services and treatment was completely overlooked in the final FY 2022-2023 budget. Counties are now faced with decisions that are likely to result in poor outcomes for some of our most vulnerable residents and increased loss of life due to mental illness, suicide and other compounding factors. Coupled with inflation and devastating impacts on mental health caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, more Pennsylvanians than ever need these community-based services that are becoming increasingly more complicated to sustain. Even as we recognize that the dollars are only short-term funds and not a long-term solution to this crisis, in the absence of increased General Fund support for county mental health, we urge the Commission to recommend to the legislature that a portion of the \$100 million in ARPA funds be allocated to aid counties until the next state budget.

Staffing shortages at all levels are rampant and providers are closing as they cannot find qualified personnel to oversee programs. As a result, law enforcement is responding to more calls of crisis, emergency rooms have become places for individuals to seek help and schools and jails are becoming defacto mental health clinics, all because the essential, community-based, preventative treatment options continue to erode.

Considering the Commission's adoption of Workforce Development and Retention as its top priority, counties could make excellent use of targeted one-time funding to begin making key investments that will help shore up the behavioral health workforce across the system. The federal funds allocated for behavioral and mental health offer a unique opportunity to support county programs by bolstering our ability to recruit and retain high-quality staff and even support some population-specific options.

In seeking to leverage the \$100 million in one-time federal dollars, counties recommend the funds be used to support adult mental health services in ways that will have a positive impact without creating unsustainable long-term obligations, as follows:

- Advertising campaigns to improve public perception of mental health and human services-based employment
- Advertising costs to attract candidates interested in openings at county programs and provider programs
- Options to incentivize providers to accept more clients and open more program slots
- Recruitment and retention bonuses for county and contract provider staff
- Programs that focus on the wrap around needs of clients that cannot be funded through base dollars (housing and other community supports, job search, prevention, etc.)
- Loan forgiveness programs to encourage employment and retention for recent graduates
- Development of specific targeted mental health programs within schools or for special populations, such as implementing evidence-based approaches to supporting older adults with mental illness and targeted mental health supports that can be provided in nursing homes and long-term care facilities

While the above measures will help to address the critical workforce shortages that are impacting counties' ability to meet the needs of our residents, the only long-term solution that will truly help counties provide the needed safety net to serve those who are struggling is for the state to recognize its role as a partner and allocate appropriate and sustainable investments for mental health base funded services in the state budget. Counties ask for a commitment from the Commission to urge the General Assembly, and both the outgoing and incoming administrations to increase county base funds on a year-over-year basis until counties and the state can fully serve residents of the commonwealth needing mental health services. After all, counties provide mental health services to commonwealth residents on behalf of the state, and therefore, we must fulfill this obligation in partnership. It is also critically important to note that any additional funding to counties must be free of new or increased administrative mandates or additional requirements, as these will simply divert the funding from going directly toward helping those with mental health needs.

Ultimately, counties appreciate any support that the Commission can offer to relieve the behavioral health staffing crisis and encourage the Commission's commitment to voicing its support of a sustained increase in funding for community-based mental health, which will pay dividends for generations to come. An increase in funding for mental health are also cost-

effective by addressing issues upfront and reducing the need for other, more costly services later, such as in our state and county corrections systems. We cannot properly address depression, anxiety, autism, substance abuse and a variety of other issues without substantial support from this Commission and the General Assembly, the Governor and the administration going forward. We look forward to working in partnership with you and our colleagues across the state to better serve our residents, our shared constituents, throughout the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please contact CCAP's Lisa Schaefer, [lschaefer@pacounties.org](mailto:lschaefer@pacounties.org), or Brinda Penyak, [bpenyak@pacounties.org](mailto:bpenyak@pacounties.org).

Sincerely,

George P. Hartwick, III  
Chair, CCAP Human Services Committee  
Dauphin County Commissioner