

2022 Children's Behavioral Health Coalition Legislative Agenda

The Children's Behavioral Health Coalition (CBHC) brings together state and local advocacy groups with a focus on policy issues and concerns specific to children, youth and families with mental health and substance use needs. CBHC works to ensure that children across Maryland have access to high quality and culturally competent behavioral health services and supports, and that resources are equitably distributed based on need and as informed by data.

Despite four decades of efforts to realize a comprehensive system of care for youth and families in Maryland, services and supports remain fragmented and inequitable. Given a growing number of societal challenges and traumas, the need for a unified effort to support youth has never been more urgent. **CBHC calls on the Maryland General Assembly to take the following steps in 2022 to enhance Maryland's system of care for children, youth and families.**



EXPAND HOME- AND COMMUNITY-BASED WRAPAROUND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children and youth with mental health and substance use needs have fewer treatment options than adults. Wraparound services for youth with intensive behavioral health needs are simply not available to many families. Appropriate home- and community-based supports for Black and brown youth are particularly limited. **The legislature must pass the Behavioral Health System Modernization Act to expand access to wraparound services for children and youth.**

SUPPORT SYSTEM REFORMS THAT ARE CO-LED AND CO-DESIGNED BY YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Community-based prevention and early intervention programs that are youth-led and youth-co-designed are increasing in popularity internationally and across the United States, and they are gaining recognition as an innovative approach to eliminating stigma and other barriers that discourage and prevent youth from accessing mental health and substance use services. **The legislature must take steps to expand these types of promising programs in Maryland.**



REFORM MARYLAND'S VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT AGREEMENT PROCESS

The Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) Act was enacted to provide a voluntary out-of-home placement for a child with high intensity mental health concerns whose needs cannot be met at home. While created with good intent, the program has become overly burdensome and beset by a series of challenges that limits its usefulness and results in significant hospital overstays and long wait times for services. **The General Assembly must pass legislation to fix and improve its process for providing high intensity out-of-home services to children in need.**



INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The vast majority of LGBTQ students report experiencing harassment or assault in schools based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity, and these students report lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression than their peers. More than half of all transgender and nonbinary youth have reported seriously considering suicide at some point in their lives. Many of these youth cite the role of gender affirming support systems, and access to gender affirming care, as directly linked with improved mental health outcomes. **The legislature must enact policies that reduce discrimination and increase access to care for LGBTQ youth.**

EXPAND SCHOOL- AND COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCES

Demand for children's mental health and substance use services has been growing for decades, but the professionals and specialists we rely on to meet that demand are stretched to the brink. Community behavioral health providers in Maryland report an average 90-day wait time for child therapy, and even though the Blueprint for Maryland's Future requires enhanced behavioral health resources for students, counties across the state are reporting significant shortages of the professionals responsible for delivering those services. **The legislature must consider steps to address this crisis, including reimbursement increases and career ladders for school behavioral health providers.**



INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOL-AGE YOUTH



Effective brain fitness interventions during childhood and adolescence produce striking results in improving the executive function skills and prosocial behaviors that are more accurate predictors of academic readiness and life success than IQ or any other performance markers—offering affordable and effective solutions to today's educational challenges. Research shows that with executive function interventions, the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the brain can be mitigated, the achievement gap interrupted, and all students can experience superior cognitive, social, and emotional functioning. **CBHC urges the adoption of evidence-based executive functioning interventions, ideally combined with social/emotional and other trauma-informed practices, in every public school to support student resiliency, wellbeing and academic success.**

SUPPORT BROADER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM EFFORTS

In addition to the child-specific priorities outlined above, CBHC supports those advocacy priorities of the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition that will positively impact the mental health and substance use needs of children, youth and families.



The Children's Behavioral Health Coalition brings together state and local advocacy groups with a focus on policy issues and concerns specific to children and youth with mental health and substance use needs. For more information, contact Margo Quinlan, mquinlan@mhamd.org or (410) 236-5488.