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Hundreds Rally in Annapolis for Behavioral Health Services

Advocates push to end behavioral health funding cuts, ensure equal access to services, include support in schools and more

Annapolis, Md. (February 27, 2020) – Amidst a continuing opioid and suicide crisis, hundreds of advocates rallied in Annapolis to urge lawmakers to help Marylanders living with mental health and substance use disorders at the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition’s “Keep the Door Open” rally. Advocates called on legislators to restore funding for behavioral health services, noting the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget [underfunds mental health and substance use treatment](#) by nearly \$25 million. They also rallied for expanding behavioral health services in schools, achieving parity for behavioral health services, fully funding behavioral health initiatives and more.

Overdose deaths increased in 2018 for the eighth year in a row, reaching an all-time high of 2,406. Advocates emphasized that in order to adequately address these matters, the legislature must honor its commitments to fully fund behavioral health programs, and behavioral health services must be affordable. Federal law requires that behavioral health treatment be as accessible through commercial insurance as is medical and surgical care. However, according to a 2019 study, Maryland ranks 4th worst in the nation in terms of patients having to receive out-of-network care for behavioral health services compared to other medical care.

“We have witnessed the devastating effects of years of neglect in the opioid overdose crisis and rising suicide rates,” said Dan Martin, senior director of public policy at the Maryland Behavioral Health Coalition. “While we’re making some headway, we’re by no means out of the woods yet.”

More than 1 in 5 Marylanders will experience a mental health or substance use disorder in any given year, and over 300,000 Marylanders now rely on the state’s public behavioral health system. Furthermore, 40% of Maryland children have been exposed to at least one Adverse Childhood Experience.

Advocates believe legislators should adopt and ensure adequate funding for a comprehensive set of strategies included in the Kirwan Commission’s report for enhancing school-based behavioral health services to better support young people.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2021 budget does not fund community mental health and substance use treatment to the extent required by either the 2019 minimum wage bill or the bipartisan HOPE Act of 2017—both of which included mandatory increases in community behavioral health spending to correct 20 years of chronic underfunding. The [budget cuts mandatory funding increases](#) from 4% to 2%.

Read the Behavioral Health Coalition’s full legislative platform [here](#).

Photographs from the rally are available on request.

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The Behavioral Health Coalition of Maryland is a diverse mix of more than 50 nonprofit organizations working together to ensure individuals affected by mental health and substance use disorders have high quality and accessible services for their needs. www.keepthedoormapenmd.org