



The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is the voice of the community on issues related to the quality and responsiveness of mental health and substance abuse disorder services.

Testimony for Joint Committee on Finance

Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Priorities for the 2017 – 2019 Biennial Budget April 5, 2017

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The Milwaukee Mental Health Task works collaboratively to identify issues faced by people affected by mental illness and by substance abuse disorders, facilitate improvements in services, give consumers and families a strong voice, reduce stigma, and implement recovery principles.

We ask state legislators to support the following priorities in the state budget, which will help to advance the independence and recovery of youth and adults with mental health and substance abuse disorder needs. These are smart investments which will support opportunities for Wisconsinites with mental health needs and substance abuse disorders, to be contributing members of the community.

Sustain Medicaid

- Continue to fully fund Medicaid which provides health care and long term support services to Wisconsin children and adults with mental health and substance abuse disorder needs. Wisconsin's investment in Medicaid is essential to the health and independence of people with mental health and substance abuse needs. Medicaid helps them get access to medication, therapy, psychiatric care, primary care doctors, as well as other supports not covered by private insurance such as peer support, personal care, employment supports, and case management.
- Improve the Medical Assistance Purchase Plan (MAPP) by expanding eligibility for those with high disability-related expenses and end the premium cliff for otherwise eligible individuals with incomes above 150% of the Federal Poverty Level who are currently priced out of the program by high premiums. Increase Medicaid eligibility for people with disabilities who cannot meet the new, more stringent, MAPP work requirements.

Invest in Mental Health

- Fund a peer-run respite for veterans in Milwaukee. (\$450,000 total)
- Increase funding to expand the Child Psychiatry Consultation Program to improve access for children and adolescents. (\$500,000 each year)
- Invest in school mental health initiatives (\$7 million) to support students with mental health needs, including increasing social workers in school, collaborating with community providers for mental health services, training for school personnel, and early intervention programs in some Milwaukee schools.
- Eliminate wait lists for the Medicaid Children's Long Term Support Medical Waiver (\$39 million). This will provide vital services to 2,200 children with physical, developmental, or emotional disabilities for long-term supports and services; currently 43% of children eligible for crucial long-term supports are waiting.

Support Services for People with Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System

- Expand the Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) program which provides reentry support for prison inmates with a mental illness to an additional 5 counties. (\$660,800 each year)
- Create a new corrections mental illness treatment and diversion unit (\$2.2 million total) and added mental health staff for restrictive housing units at three DOC facilities (\$592,000 total).
- Expand mental health staff and services at the Department of Corrections Copper Lakes School for girls. (\$556,000 total) additional staffing at Lincoln Hills (\$1,306,800), and funding for staff for safe distribution of medication to the juvenile population (\$158,900). Although these improvements are needed, the status quo is not working. We call on policy makers to explore alternatives to Lincoln Hills that can be locally based, as the majority of youth are from the Milwaukee area, and can provide a continuum of services and supports. A stakeholder group should be convened to review Wisconsin's entire juvenile corrections system to determine best practices to reduce recidivism and promote success in the community.
- Grants for the expansion of the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion program, which provides alternatives to incarceration for high-risk, nonviolent offenders. (\$9,000,000 over the biennium)

Invest in Transportation

- The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force asks the Legislature to restore Transit Operating Aids to maintain public transit services. Recent reductions in state operating assistance have shifted nearly \$17 million in costs to municipalities, increased passenger fares, and forced cuts to transit.

Access to transportation is vital for maintaining recovery and independence. A high percentage of people with mental health needs are low income and do not own cars, and rely on public transit to access mental health and other support services, get to jobs, grocery shopping, participate in support groups, attend recovery programs, worship, etc.

Support Housing Initiatives

- Amends transitional housing statute to create flexibility for grant funds to support homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing, which are evidence-based programs.
- Authorizes WHEDA to pilot a prioritization of Housing Choice (Section 8) Vouchers to chronically homeless individuals on voucher wait-list, and provide case mgmt.
- Creates a homeless services coordinator position at the DHS to work with homeless agencies and municipalities to develop a Medicaid waiver for intensive case mgmt.