



*The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is committed to being a leader in identifying issues faced by all people affected by mental illness, facilitating improvements in mental health services, giving consumers and families a strong voice, reducing stigma, and implementing recovery principles.*

**Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Comments on  
2019 Behavioral Health Division Budget Narrative to  
Milwaukee County Mental Health Board Finance Committee – June 28, 2018**

**Jeanne Lowry, MMHTF Co-chair**

On behalf of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force (MMHTF), thank you for this opportunity to comment on the 2019 Behavioral Health Division Budget Narrative. The MMHTF includes over 40 community organizations and comprises service providers, individuals who live with a mental illness or substance use disorder, advocates, family members, and other stakeholders who work collaboratively to support improvements in mental health services and advance recovery.

We understand that this is a difficult budget and that as policymakers you are facing difficult choices. We are deeply concerned that revenues are decreasing, which will put at risk the capacity to maintain the commitment to expand community based services and supports to better meet the significant needs in our community for mental health services, and treatment for substance use disorders. In addition, we are concerned that the cost for inpatient services continues to increase, while capacity to provide inpatient services has diminished. We ask for your leadership in finding new options to increase revenue and to support the goal we all share - to support recovery, including access to quality treatment and a range of supports for Milwaukee County children, youth, and adults who live with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

**The MMHTF commends the following investments which we identified as priorities for the 2019 budget:**

- Increasing enrollment in CCS for children and adults
- Support for community placements for individuals with complex needs, some of whom have lingered on inpatient units due to the lack of needed community supports.
- Funding to support the Milwaukee County Housing Department initiative to end chronic homelessness, as well as funding to expand and enhance Bridge Housing. Without stable housing, recovery is not possible.
- Funding to increase access to AODA Recovery Support Coordination, and the out patient plus program,
- Continued funding of Crisis and Assessment Response Teams (CART) and to support the new Peer Run Respite, which has the potential to help support recovery, avert crises, and avoid hospitalizations
- Transportation funding, to ensure access to mental health services and supports, and the continuum of activities needed to meet basic needs, support independence and community integration.
- Mental health and crisis service expansion on the North side.

We support the Focus on Quality, and urge that this include a commitment to elevate the voices of those who receive services, including an increased focus on measurable outcomes that are client centered and strength based, and a high level of provider accountability, including high quality, timeliness, and responsiveness to client needs, as well as ensuring provider rates needed to support quality and provider retention.

**We urge you to prioritize diversion of people with mental illness from the criminal justice system,** and to ensure that the budget provides the needed funding to support diversion, including post booking stabilization.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations for the 2019 BHD budget, and for your service on the Mental Health Board. Please feel free to contact us for additional information.