

Legislative Priorities for 2023 for MH/DS of the East Central Region

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The Focus for 2023's Legislative Priorities: Workforce Issues

Workforce issues will continue to be the biggest challenge in 2023 and beyond in making sure that quality mental health and disability services are available to all Iowans. All regions are facing increased challenges in supporting a workforce that can adequately meet the rising demands of Iowans facing brain health and disability needs. The following are issues that we believe state legislators should address to support the MH/DS system in Iowa.

Priority 1: Reduce barriers to availability of Direct Support Professionals and other mental health professionals

Background

Iowa has a serious shortage of prescribing and direct care professionals. Medicaid reimbursement rates and the lack of availability of direct support professionals in Iowa contribute to this shortage. The rates have been too slow to keep up with the rise in the number of people served as well as the cost of inflation. Also, college and medical school programs don't offer enough opportunities for residencies in Iowa. Non-compete agreements hinder the recruitment of practitioners thus limiting the number of essential prescribers available to Iowans.

Recommendations

1. Address the shortage of direct support professionals by supporting IME's efforts to review and adopt a system to **set reimbursement rates** that reflect the actual cost of providing services. MH/DS providers across the state are facing the reality of closing their doors because current reimbursement rates prevent them from competing in an environment with fewer employees.
2. Work with medical schools and nurse practitioner programs in Iowa to encourage them to offer **more psychiatric residencies**, and establish **incentive programs** to attract practitioners to Iowa.
3. Eliminate the use of **non-compete agreements** currently in use by state-funded schools, so that regions could contract with willing practitioners for services.
4. Continue to expand the use of tele-health opportunities and increase the use of technology to allow and enhance the use of remote monitoring for residential and vocational support services.

Priority 2: Allow the MH/DS Regions to sustain a fund balance of 10% for FY24 and beyond.

Background

Timely payments to providers are critical in helping to maintain an adequate level of service providers. Currently, SF 619 places a limit on fund balances at 5% by FY 2024.

Recommendation

Raise the limit on the fund balance to 10%. This would allow regions to maintain a one-month financial cushion to make certain that providers could be paid on time if DHS allocations would be delayed.

Priority 3: Integrate funding and policy for co-occurring disorders.

Background The East Central Region believes that the entanglement of mental health and substance use disorder issues requires urgent action. In 2021 the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMSHA) reported that 6.7% of US adults or 17 million people experience issues related to both mental health and substance use. Because these disorders are so inextricably linked, the East Central Region believes the Iowa Legislature should take action to ensure that the integration of behavioral health and substance use services is completed to improve the health outcomes for all Iowans. Following the example of the federal Health and Human Services administration, Iowans should be allowed equitable access to affordable, high-quality, and culturally appropriate care. An increase in bi-directional care where behavioral health and substance use disorder providers coordinate and deliver comprehensive, whole-person care will ensure that public dollars are efficiently utilized, reduce the strain on these fragmented systems, and enhance the health of Iowa communities.

Recommendation

1. Blend the structure of funding for behavioral health and substance use services
2. Regulate team-based care or close coordination between providers so services are delivered in integrated care models.

East Central Region Background

Mental Health/Disability Services of the East Central Region (MH/DS of the ECR) is a partnership between nine eastern Iowa counties to provide comprehensive mental health and disability services to individuals in those counties. This regional base of services meets or exceeds statewide standards to address Iowa's mental health and disability services needs. MH/DS of the ECR proudly supports and provides services for Benton, Bremer, Buchanan, Delaware, Dubuque, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, and Linn Counties with a budget of over \$29 million for its 604,888 regional citizens and is the largest region in the state.