

Detailed Budget Talking Points

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Last week the PA State Senate passed a budget bill (SB 850) that would slash the community and state hospital budgets. Specifically, the budget makes the following cuts:

- Community mental health budget is reduced by \$9.789M; this cut is in addition to the Governor's proposed 2% decrease. State hospitals are also funded under this allocation.
- Behavioral Health Services Initiative (BHSI) is reduced by 24 percent (\$13M)

A reduction to the community mental health budget of almost \$10M will result in cutting off community services to over 4,000 individuals. The BHSI reduction will eliminate services to 2,761 individuals with mental illness and 7,500 individuals in need of substance abuse treatment. Without BHSI funding, persons in need of behavioral health treatment who do not qualify for Medical Assistance will lose a critical lifeline to services.

1) Budget Cuts Increase Costs for Care

Cutting funding for behavioral health services does not mean that the persons in need will just go away. When they are denied services that support their recovery, they are likely to utilize other services that are more costly and less effective, such as corrections, homeless shelters, and emergency rooms.

2) Individuals Seeking Services for the First Time Will Be Turned Away

These proposed budget cuts come at a time when community programs are documenting a growing number of people seeking treatment because they are unemployed and without insurance; are veterans coming back from the war; or are people experiencing significant and increased anxiety over economic instability.

3) Counties Will Bear Burden of Cuts

SB 850 avoids a state tax increase. Since the need and costs will remain, county government will be forced to raise taxes to fill the gap.

4) State Hospitals Will Restrict Admissions

State hospitals will be forced to restrict admission and reduce existing services

5) The State's Commitment to Community Integration for People Who Have Mental Illnesses Will Be Broken.

- **Individuals discharged from state hospitals will not get the promised support.** The state will be unable to fulfill its ongoing commitment to the

persons who were discharged as part of the closures of Harrisburg and Mayview State Hospitals. The majority of these men and women are living successfully in their communities with supports and services funded by the community mental health services funding

- **Mental health courts will not be implemented.** OMHSAS cannot move forward on expanding mental health courts, which have been demonstrated as an effective method of redirecting persons away from inappropriate incarceration and toward successful reintegration into the community.

6) Behavioral healthcare providers will reduce services. Without adequate funding providers will lay off experienced employees and reduce services. This impacts not just the quantity of available services but the quality.

7) Rainy Day Fund. The nationwide economic slowdown has resulted in a serious revenue shortfall in Pennsylvania. There is a Rainy Day Fund of \$750 million and the Governor proposed to use \$375 million of the fund to fill some of the shortfall. The Senate eliminated that money from their budget and is opposed to using any of the Rainy Day Fund. It is not just raining, it is pouring in Pennsylvania so any final budget must include a portion of the Rainy Day Fund for essential government services.

8) Essential Government Services. Behavioral health services are essential state services. In a very difficult economic environment elected officials must make tough decisions and eliminate or significantly reduce funding for non-essential programs. We contend that the state's responsibility to provide a safety net for vulnerable populations certainly includes the provision of mental health and substance abuse services.