

2019

Legislative Priorities

Georgia Mental Health Public Policy Partnership

The Georgia Mental Health Public Policy Partnership is a statewide alliance of public and private organizations collectively committed to eradicating stigma and improving the mental health of Georgians.



Mental Health Parity in Georgia

Without effective treatment, people with mental illness and substance use disorders may find it **difficult to find or maintain a job, less likely to complete education and training opportunities, and require more social support services. In fact, it is estimated to cost the United States at least \$300 billion annually (Reeves, 2013). Federal law (MHPEA, 2008) requires mental health and substance use disorders receive coverage that is equal or “on par” with medical-surgical coverage.**

SOLUTION

PASS the PEACH Act (Parity Ensures Access to Crucial Healthcare) legislation that empowers the Office of the Insurance and Fire Safety to hold insurance companies accountable for **providing insured Georgians with the behavioral health care to which they are entitled under state and federal law and for which they paid.**



Safe and Supported Children

The State of Georgia has a responsibility to ensure that our children receive medical care that first, does no harm. **Conversion therapy practices have no scientific basis, contradict the medical community’s understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, and put young people at risk of serious harm, including severe depression, anxiety, and substance misuse, which contribute to a higher risk of suicide.**

SOLUTION

PASS legislation prohibiting licensed mental health professionals in Georgia from providing conversion therapy to minors.

The proposed legislation does not deprive minors of access to competent, ethical mental health care. It **lawfully regulates the provision of health care to the most vulnerable of Georgia’s citizens – our minor children.**



Tele Health Medicine

Telemedicine is an effective practice to **relieving the state’s shortages** in Psychiatrists and licensed mental health professionals, **facilitating access to quality mental health care services, especially in underserved areas where access to care is a challenge.** It increases individual choice and expands the scope of services one can receive at their usual care site.

SOLUTION

REDUCE barriers to telemedicine implementation, fund necessary infrastructure (i.e., rural broadband connectivity), and fund incentives for mental health professionals who offer telemedicine services.



Access to Mental Healthcare

With prevalence of mental illness at 19%, more than 1,365,000 Georgians have a diagnosable mental illness. However, **Georgia ranks 43 out of 50 states for access to mental health care resources and insurances.** This leads to disparate access to treatment, such that 61% of those who need treatment do not receive services and 25% of Georgians with a mental illness are uninsured (Mental Health America, 2016).

SOLUTION

OPEN Medicaid mental health codes to address the growing needs of physicians encountering patients with mental health needs and leverage state funds to access matching federal dollars.

Research has shown that citizens of states that have increased access to healthcare coverage are **receiving more mental health care, managing chronic depression better, and using costly emergency department care, less.**



Workforce Development

Nationally, there are workforce shortages of mental health providers including psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and advanced nurse practitioners who are specializing in mental health care. Georgia is ranked 48th in the availability of mental health workforce. **In fact, in Georgia there are only 10.9 Psychiatrists per 100,000 people and only 5.9 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 youth.**

SOLUTION

INCREASE the number of professionals in the state specializing in mental health by incentivizing programs that offer courses earlier in a student's training, incentivizing professionals who specialize in mental health training, and offering loan forgiveness for those who work in rural areas.

SUPPORT the requirement and expansion of mental health education for pediatricians, first responders, and EMS professionals.

Georgia Mental Health Public Policy Coalition

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