



Mental Health Association in Michigan

LETTER FROM LANSING

A monthly public policy newsletter from the
Mental Health Association in Michigan (MHAM)

Welcome to the May 2020 edition of MHAM's monthly newsletter that provides you with public policy updates and other information that impacts the behavioral health care of you and those you love. This edition of Letter from Lansing is being provided in honor of Mental Health Month.

"What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation." – Glenn Close

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary." – Fred Rogers

A Note from the President & CEO

June and summer are rapidly approaching and the state of Michigan is only beginning to emerge from over ten weeks of lockdown and quarantine due to the Covid-19 crisis.

The state of Michigan has been significantly impacted by

the coronavirus and many Michiganders are struggling under the weight of financial as well as emotional burdens that are but a few of the challenges individuals may be experiencing. Perhaps one of the positive aspects to the pandemic is that it has highlighted the necessity of addressing the mental health needs of Michigan citizens as much as the physical health needs are addressed.



Having access to mental health care is critical right now. It is important that you continue to pay attention to your mental health during the coronavirus crisis. It is normal to feel afraid and anxious, especially when faced with a situation that has many "unknowns". If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by symptoms of anxiety, depression, or hopelessness, please reach out for help. **If you** are experiencing emotional distress in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, **get help from:**

Michigan Stay Well Counseling via the COVID-19 Hotline

Call 1-888-535-6136

Press "8" to talk to a Michigan Stay Well counselor.

Counselors available 24/7 - confidential and free

OR



Public Policy Updates

by Dr. Mark Reinstein

MHAM Public Policy Consultant

Work Begins on Making New Mediation Law Operational

The new mediation law (Public Act 55 of 2020) that MHAM helped create has not yet taken practical effect. That is disappointing, but the COVID pandemic has required a tremendous amount of attention and resources from the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS).

We are pleased to report that MHAM, the Community Mental Health Association, a mediation organization, and MDHHS have begun working together so that the law can become operational. We can't go into specific details yet because they're not finalized, but our goal is to have everything in place (funding, policies, procedures, etc.) so that optional, non-binding mediation of consumer complaints about service planning/implementation can operationally begin Oct. 1st (the start of the state's next fiscal year).

As we move along toward October, we will update you on progress made.

State Work on Behavioral Health Transformation Paused

At the May 15 meeting of the state's Behavioral Health Advisory Council, on which representatives from MHAM serve, a written communication from the MDHHS Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Administration was distributed. The communication included the following: "We wanted to share this update because, given the volume of work needed to effectively respond to COVID-19, our behavioral health transformation work has been temporarily paused...In this ever-changing environment, it is difficult to confidently assert the next steps for behavioral health transformation..."

We believe this pause is well-advised.

More on State Budget Situation

There is nothing yet from the federal government that would assist states in backfilling budget holes caused by the COVID virus. Michigan is estimated to have a \$3.2 billion hole for the rest of this fiscal year, and another \$3 billion for FY-21.

Drastic cuts may have to be made, and we will ask that Medicaid and mental health be protected as much as possible.

Medicaid is a federal-state program with the feds as the majority payer. Michigan is not about to leave the Medicaid program. But the only large avenue open for cutting Michigan dollars that match federal payments is to reduce Medicaid rates of reimbursement and payments to contract providers. Under federal law, these reductions are not supposed to go so far as to render promised services under Medicaid inoperable. However, if provider rates of reimbursement are reduced, this could have a negative impact on the availability of Medicaid-covered services. MHAM will be monitoring this situation closely as the legislature presents its budget recommendations to the Governor.

One particular Medicaid requirement we will highlight – something our organization has worked on for years – is the protection Michigan has had since 2004 on access to Medicaid prescriptions for persons experiencing mental illness, epilepsy, HIV-AIDs, conditions requiring organ transplant, and (to a partial degree) cancer. This has allowed vulnerable citizens with serious conditions to escape the dangerous practices of prior authorization, step therapy, and therapeutic substitution. A legislatively required MDHHS psychotropic medication workgroup, which we served on, recommended in February '19

that the state continue to “carve out” Medicaid psychotropic medications (including anti-seizure and substance use drugs) from the state’s Medicaid Health Plans (MHPs). The workgroup also highlighted department data that 86% of all prescriptions carved out from MHPs are already for generics. Further, 99% of all carveout prescriptions were for mental health, yet these only accounted for 62% of state costs across all drug carveout categories. Attempting to save a modest amount of money here will cost more in the long run because of not matching the right medications to vulnerable consumers’ circumstances.

We also call attention to some vital General Fund Needs:

1. Non-Medicaid Funding for Community Mental Health (CMH): The amount allocated for FY-20 (\$125 million) is already lower than needed. The well-being of our constituents cannot bear any cuts to this line; reductions would be catastrophic. (Note: Coinciding with lessened GF money for CMH since the establishment of Healthy Michigan, the Flinn Foundation, Detroit, reported in 2019 a 10% reduction in CMH mental illness clients over a five-year period.)

2. State psychiatric hospitals and forensic mental health services: 75% of this budget section is supported by GF. We cannot do without the Forensic Center, given the great number of people with mental health-related conditions who meet the justice system. And regarding our state psychiatric hospitals, only one is for children (which suggests it must remain), and the three we have left for adults leave us with one of the worst per capita adult bed rates in the nation (per the Treatment Advocacy Center, Virginia). State hospital beds are the only source at this time of intermediate- and longer-term stays. Private psychiatric hospitals and psychiatric beds in community hospitals (both of which can receive Medicaid reimbursement) offer an average length of stay that is less than a week, which is too short to appropriately reduce symptoms for many. (Note: MHAM is conducting a review of 2015-19 death reports to the state from private psychiatric hospitals and psychiatric units in community hospitals. During this period, over 50 Michigan residents died, often from suicide, within days of discharge from such hospitals.) Additionally, we do not have near enough community resources at present to provide the levels of service intensity needed by those who could leave state hospitals if such resources were more plentiful.

Your Voice is Needed!

You can and should make your views on protecting mental health budget items known to your State Representative and State Senator in Lansing. Constituent views – and your personal and family stories – are extremely valuable and influential for the Representatives and Senators. Please call or write (letter or e-mail). For more information on how to locate the contact information for your State Senator or State Representative in Lansing, here is a link to the legislature web sites:

To find your Senator: <https://senate.michigan.gov/>

To find your Representative: <https://www.house.mi.gov/>

It is also important to contact the chairpersons of the Appropriations Subcommittees that make recommendations to the legislature about how to allocation dollars for programs and services.

Senate Committee on Community Health/Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee Chair is Senator Peter MacGregor, R. He can be reached via phone call at: 517.373.0797 or toll free at: (855) 347-8028. Or via email at: SenPMacGregor@senate.michigan.gov Please include name, address, and phone number.

House Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Appropriations Chair is Representative Mary Whiteford, R. She can be reached via phone call at: 517.373.0836 or via email at MaryWhiteford@house.mi.gov.

Announcements

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING!



STICKING IT TO MENTAL ILLNESS

For every sticker **Mitten On My Mind** sells, MHAM gets \$1. Join us as we continue to raise mental health awareness and continue to advocate for those with a mental illness and their loved ones! <https://mittenonmymind.com/collections/stickers>

CLICK HERE for a video highlight.

Mental Health Association in Michigan Annual Meeting Notice June 11 | 3pm

**The Annual Membership meeting will be on Thursday, June 1
at 3:00pm via ZOOM**

Thank you for being a loyal supporter and member of the Mental Health Association in Michigan. MHAM is the state's oldest public policy and advocacy organization that works to improve mental health care and social welfare policy for individuals with psychiatric conditions across the lifespan. It is that time of the year when MHAM hosts its annual membership meeting. This year, due to the COVID-19 crisis and in order to protect the health and safety of its membership, the MHAM Board of Directors has decided to hold the annual meeting and its board meeting virtually via ZOOM. The purpose of the annual membership meeting is to hear about the public policy initiatives that are the focus of the Association's work. It also gives you, as a member, the opportunity to learn more about the Association and to hear about possible changes to public policy at the state level that might impact the mental health care of you or someone you love and support.

The program for the annual membership meeting includes:

- Public policy updates - Dr. Mark Reinstein, Public Policy Consultant, MHAM
- Presentations - Bob Sheehan and Alan Bolter, CMH Association of Michigan
- Kyle Williams, Director of Litigation Strategies, MI Protection & Advocacy Service, Inc.
- Greg Boyd, Coordinator for the Partners in Crisis Advisory Board, MHAM

Here is the information for participation via ZOOM:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88918427196pwd=U3N5ZzQ4OTRtK3AxWFVqQitnZVphdz09>

Password: 075873

To join via phone: (312) 626-6799 | Meeting ID: 889 1842 7196

****Please note, if you intend to vote, you must join the meeting via video and use the link to attend. Voting will be done via the chat box to Marianne Huff directly.**

Action item: Members of the association will also vote on re-electing current members of the MHAM Board to three-year and two-year terms:

Joe Haveman – 3 years

Dr. Oliver Cameron, MD – 2 years

David Gruber – 3 years
David Kallman – 3 years
Margaret Keeler, NP – 3 years
Malkia Newman – 3 years
Elizabeth Pratt – 3 years
Ben Robinson – 3 years
Dawn Goldstein, Ph.D. – 3 years (new board member)
Mark Creekmore, Ph.D. – 3 years (new board member)

Dr. Linda Hryhorczuk, MD – 2 years

Positions to be filled: Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary Pro Tem and Treasurer Pro Tem.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We live – and will continue for some time – in a new world. The pandemic has shown we do not have health care systems that work for all. That is certainly true when it comes to mental health. We are already seeing significant mental health “fallout” from the pandemic, and that will continue to grow. Now is not the time to say, “Everything gets cut proportionally.” Some things are more important than others to the welfare and security of Michigan residents. The fostering of good mental health and well-being promotes safety and security. Having access to quality behavioral health services in Michigan is fundamental.



The indisputable linkage between the body, the mind and the spirit has long been debated but now it is understood. The body affects the mind and vice versa. And, in the same way that there is a reciprocal relationship on the mind’s health upon the body, we now understand that environmental factors, also known as social determinants of health, also figure prominently in the wellness of the body and of the mind. Although the COVID-19 crisis has brought an awareness of myriad weaknesses in various systems into our collective view, the fact remains that mental health and well-being is as important as physical health. The ability to feel and to be psychologically well is as important as having healthy food to eat, access to safe and affordable housing and access to social supports such as friendships and community.

Take care of yourselves! Stay tuned....

Marianne Huff, LMSW
President and CEO

Letter from Lansing is published monthly by MHAM. The primary mode of distributing the newsletter is electronic mail, but we will postal-mail copies to persons lacking internet access. If you’ve come across this issue through a friend or colleague and wish to subscribe (there is no charge), kindly let us know. If at any point you wish to unsubscribe, simply contact mhamiweb@gmail.com.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Mental Health Association in Michigan

Marianne Huff, President & CEO | Oliver Cameron, M.D., Ph.D., Board Chair

NEW ADDRESS

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mhamich@aol.com | mha-mi.com (membership available on-line)

A United Way-Supported Agency, affiliated with Mental Health America

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