



March 6, 2012

Representative Brian S. Dempsey, Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Stephen M. Brewer, Chairman
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Re: EOHHS FY 2013 Budget

Dear Chairmen Dempsey, Brewer and Honorable Committee Members:

On behalf of the membership of the Association for Behavioral Healthcare (ABH), thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Fiscal Year 2013 budget recommendations for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and its departments. ABH is a statewide association representing over eighty community-based mental health and addiction treatment provider organizations. Our members are the primary providers of publicly-funded behavioral healthcare services in the Commonwealth, serving approximately 81,000 Massachusetts residents daily and over three-quarters of a million residents annually while employing 37,500 people.

Ensuring that individuals and families have access to community-based mental health and addiction services that are person-centered, outcome-oriented and both clinically and cost-effective, is a goal we believe we share with the Commonwealth. As you develop your FY 2013 budget, we ask that you increase funding for community-based services funded by the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS) to achieve this mutual goal.

Stability for the Community Services

Lack of access to critical behavioral healthcare services remains a significant barrier to preventing and treating behavioral health disorders, and results in more expensive treatment being delivered in higher-intensity settings. ABH providers know from experience that barriers to accessing community-based mental health and substance use disorder services can be debilitating and sometimes fatal.

While we are encouraged by the legislature's recognition of the importance of community-based mental health and substance use disorder services, the community behavioral healthcare system continues to struggle from years of budget reductions which have yet to be restored.

Consequently, thousands of individuals and families are unable to access the necessary services and supports to treat mental health and/or substance use disorders. In light of this unacceptable

situation, funding for services must be increased to ensure that individuals are able to access needed care and to provide stability for the community behavioral health system to the greatest extent possible.

ABH strongly supports the philosophy of *Community First Initiative* – that whenever possible, individuals should live and be served in community settings, with minimum lengths of stay in acute and continuing care hospitals, and maximum diversion from inpatient care and emergency rooms through use of community-based emergency services and alternative levels of care.

To achieve this goal, however, the Commonwealth must commit the financial resources necessary to ensure adults and children with mental illness and/or substance use disorders have the ability to live successfully in their own communities.

Department of Mental Health

Adequate funding for the Department of Mental Health (DMH) is essential to successfully serve individuals across the Commonwealth in need of mental health services. DMH offers individuals with mental illness many critical community-based services that are not available through MassHealth or private insurance. **For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to increase funding for DMH community accounts by \$30 million (line items 5042-5000; 5046-0000; 5046-2000; 5047-0001; and 5055-0000).**

ABH and our members believe that DMH community-based services are not currently sufficiently funded to truly support recovery and resiliency for individuals living with a mental illness. As you know, of the 21,000 people who receive services provided by the Department of Mental Health (DMH), over 90% receive all or most of their services in the community settings. The community-based service system needs to be fundamentally strengthened in order to better coordinate care and appropriately serve these DMH clients.

Although we commend the legislature for its leadership in increasing funding for DMH by \$20 million last year, overall funding for the Department is still \$55 million below the FY2009 appropriation, according to a report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Providers continue to report serious concerns about their programs' level of staffing and resulting ability to assure staff and client safety while meeting the acute needs of individuals being discharged from inpatient services. Individuals being discharged from state hospital beds often depend on specially-focused resources to support their acute needs in the community. Issues of medical co-morbidity, forensic involvement, aging, and increasingly complex psychotropic medication needs are further challenges for community-based services given the availability of current resources.

Last year DMH convened a Task Force on Staff and Client Safety. The Task Force made a number of recommendations to strengthen community-based services for individuals receiving DMH-funded services, including the recommendation that the Commonwealth steadily increase funding for DMH over five years. **We support the report of the DMH Task Force on Staff and Client Safety and ask that its recommendations be reflected in your FY13 budget recommendations.**

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

While we were disheartened by the 2010 ballot initiative that resulted in the exemption of the state sales tax from alcohol sold in stores, we are extremely grateful for the legislature's continued commitment to preserving funding for substance use disorder treatment and prevention services.

We urge you to continue this commitment by supporting Governor Patrick's FY13 budget recommendation to increase funding for the Bureau by \$1.7 million in line item 4512-0200 to maintain existing services.

Additionally, we request an additional \$5 million for that same line item for Young Adult Case Management Services. This new funding would be used to procure 83 case managers to serve 9,600 young adults. Young adults tend to have the poorest treatment outcomes for length of stay in care. A comprehensive program for young adult case management services will help get young adults into treatment, stay in treatment and reduce reliance on Section 35 civil commitments.

We also ask that you maintain funding for the DPH/Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (line items 4512-0201, 4512-0202, and 4512-0203). These critical substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery support services are an essential part of the Commonwealth's safety net. If funding for addiction treatment is cut, access to treatment will be reduced and the state will pay more to serve these same clients in emergency rooms, our court system, and prison beds.

MassHealth Behavioral Health

Medicaid finances medically necessary behavioral health services for individuals and families, ensuring the stability of some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. For example, MassHealth psychiatric day treatment services provide essential services for individuals being discharged from state hospitals, helping individuals remain in their communities. In addition, MassHealth behavioral health services include vital substance use disorder services for individuals across the Commonwealth. MassHealth behavioral health services do more than keep ill people off the streets; they keep people alive. As such, the Commonwealth must take steps to ensure that these valuable services continue to be available to the state's residents.

ABH has been advocating for years for increased support for the now-fragile outpatient behavioral health delivery system. Many organizations have eliminated or reduced outpatient behavioral health services, driven in part by significant increases in the cost of psychiatry and medication management services which has made it difficult to maintain the financial viability of outpatient services.

Increased MassHealth reimbursement rates are greatly needed in order to ensure that outpatient services are available going forward. As the foundation of the entire behavioral health delivery system, outpatient services remain the most cost-effective means to prevent utilization of higher-intensity and higher-cost services. If the system truly seeks to make quality, cost-effective care accessible at the least intensive level in local communities, it is imperative that outpatient services receive greater support. **We ask that you support Governor Patrick's FY13 budget recommendation to appropriate an additional \$4 million to increase MassHealth**

reimbursement rates for outpatient behavioral health.

As you know, the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) is underway. As the state continues to work to further develop and refine this new system, adequate funding is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the *Rosie D.* court order. These services are absolutely essential to strengthening our community-based mental health system to better serve children living with Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED) in Massachusetts.

Rates for Human and Social Service Programs

We would like to thank the legislature for your support for Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2008 relative to Rates for Human and Social Service Programs. Fair and adequate reimbursement rates are the cornerstone of a stable community-based behavioral health system. Inadequate rates directly impact the ability of providers to ensure that clients have access to the services they need to live in their communities. **We ask that your FY13 budget reflect funding for rate adjustments established through Chapter 257.**

Community-based provider organizations embrace on a daily basis the opportunity to help individuals return to live in the community and begin to recover with the support of homes, jobs, peers, family and friends. Those same organizations, however, find it extremely difficult to try to do so without the resources necessary to support individuals in achieving recovery to the fullest extent possible. For these reasons, we look forward to working with the legislature and the Administration to achieve these mutual goals

If you have any questions or comments, I would be happy to address them at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Vicker V. DiGravio III
President/CEO