



## End of Legislative Session Update

Thank you to all of the members who reached out to their state legislators to communicate support for the mental health omnibus bill as the Legislature reached the end of their formal session. ABH is excited to share that the House and Senate recognized the urgency of expanding mental health access and passed a final version of the bill, **S.3097, An Act addressing barriers to mental health**. This bill is essential to improving mental health access and parity, addressing emergency department boarding, and improving the mental health crisis system. Please see page 2 for more information on this bill.

During the final hours of the session, it also became clear the Legislature **would not be immediately acting on the Economic Development bill that currently sits in Conference Committee**. As you may recall, the Senate had included \$250M and the House included \$100M for the human service workforce in their respective versions. The Legislature has committed to continuing to work on the bill as they get a clearer idea of the Commonwealth's fiscal picture, which was upended this weekend with the triggering of a 1986 Massachusetts law that would require the state to return up to \$3B in tax relief to residents this year. Members can anticipate updates on the progress of these conversations as they move forward.

## Salary Survey Available for Purchase

ABH, in partnership with Gallagher Surveys, developed a salary and benefits survey that focused specifically on mental health and substance use disorder providers. The results are now in and available for purchase. We anticipate that these results will be a great resource for members.

**Survey Cost:** As with past surveys, a significant discount will be given to ABH members who participated in the salary survey. The cost to purchase the survey is as follows: **\$400 for ABH members who participated in the survey, and \$1200 for ABH members who did not participate**, but who wish to purchase the survey. *This survey is not available to non-members.* Click [here](#) for purchasing information.

## Family First Prevention Services Act Clearinghouse

Developed in accordance with the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), the [Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) was established by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families to conduct an objective and transparent review of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements. The Clearinghouse rates programs and services as *well-supported, supported, promising, or does not currently meet criteria.*

# Mental Health Omnibus Bill

As you know, the House and Senate reached a compromise on an omnibus mental health bill - S.3091, An Act addressing barriers to care for mental health. The conference committee report, which has since been sent to the Governor, includes provisions critical to expanding access to behavioral healthcare, including:

- Required reporting comparing the minimum payment rates (fee floors) set by MassHealth and the rates paid to community-based behavioral health clinics by MCEs, an ABH priority;
- Requires the Health Policy Commission (HPC) to develop a universal consent form for the exchanging of substance use and mental health information, an ABH priority;
- Requires commercial coverage of emergency service programs (ESP) services, an ABH priority;
- Creates an interim licensure level for individuals working towards independent licensure as an LMHC, an ABH priority;
- Creates commissions to study medical necessity determinations, 988 infrastructure, and expedited psychiatric inpatient admissions (EPIA), and names ABH to each commission;
- Requires DCF to ensure behavioral health screenings and referrals for children entering care;
- Removes prior authorization requirements for annual mental health wellness examinations and Community-Based Acute Treatment (CBAT);
- Strengthens parity enforcement and consumer protections; and
- Requires reporting from HPC and the Center on Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) on behavioral health planning, utilization and expenditures.

ABH extends our sincere gratitude to the conferees: Senators Cyr, Friedman and Tarr and Representatives Madaro, Garlick and Kane as well as Senate President Spilka, House Speaker Mariano, and Ways and Means Chairs Rodrigues and Michlewitz. This expansive bill will help maintain the Commonwealth's commitment to providing high-quality, accessible mental health care to those who need it.

## FY23 Conference Committee Budget

In mid-July, the FY23 Conference Committee released their recommendations for the [Fiscal Year 2023 Budget](#), which totaled \$52.7B. The Conference Committee's budget is based on a fiscal 2023 tax revenue estimate of \$39.575B, a \$2.66B increase from initial estimates, and the bill factors in about \$14B in federal reimbursements. The bill contemplates a \$1.46B deposit into the state's stabilization fund, which would bring the balance to \$7.35B at the end of the budget year. ABH's complete analysis can be found [here](#).

# A Message on Community Behavioral Health Centers

Recently, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services announced [Community Behavioral Health Center \(CBHC\) awards](#). This is an important step in the implementation of the [Behavioral Health Roadmap](#) to strengthen the behavioral health system, and we are extremely excited about how these centers will transform behavioral healthcare, particularly crisis services, in Massachusetts. We are very pleased that the majority of the new centers are ABH members and look forward to helping support them in implementation. Yet, the great majority of our members are not becoming CBHCs. ABH remains fully committed to all of our members, not only CBHCs.

The CBHC launch is a very promising step in terms of new investment and alternative payment approaches, yet these centers alone cannot meet all of the outpatient behavioral health needs of the people of the Commonwealth. We need healthy, robust outpatient clinics that not only deliver treatment services but that teach and train the future workforce. Behavioral health delivery system reforms require a strengthened outpatient system. ABH's priorities remain unchanged, including but not limited to, concerted advocacy for new and longitudinal investment in outpatient services.

ABH is deeply appreciative that legislative leaders in the Senate and the House continue to advance major pieces of behavioral health legislation to promote access and parity. The Baker Administration and the Legislature have seen to it that federal ARPA and other resources are being deployed in Massachusetts to supplement rates and also to expand student loan repayment programs by \$200 million for behavioral health staff. Finally, one of our legislative priority bills to increase MassHealth outpatient clinic rates has advanced to a key committee.

We have been hearing from you about committed, qualified staff who are unable to stay in the field, primarily because of inadequate compensation and unsustainable pressures. Our [Outpatient Access Issue Brief](#) validated the alarming experience that members have been relaying – more clinicians are leaving clinics than coming in to be trained.

The brief not only shed public light on exacerbated longstanding workforce challenges that threaten the entire BH system, but also made solution-oriented recommendations, including outpatient clinic rate increases by commercial and public payers, rate parity among providers, and expanded student loan repayment programs to boost recruitment and retention. The brief garnered [significant coverage](#), including the [Boston Globe](#), [WBUR](#), [CommonWealth Magazine](#), [GBH News](#), and [State House News Service](#). A Boston Globe editorial then [cited the brief](#) in a call to value mental health appropriately. In addition, we continued to leverage this data in an [op-ed calling for additional investment in outpatient services](#). Thank you to all of you who took part in the data collection exercise critical to the success of this brief.

ABH is planning to issue briefs on substance use disorder treatment and recovery services and Children's Behavioral Health Initiative services in the next several months.

Finally, in the human services sphere, we continue to partner with our colleagues in The Collaborative to advocate for higher mental health and addiction treatment rates and market salaries. Last year, we successfully advocated with the Baker Administration to make a post-promulgation update to all rates set that year to more current salary benchmarks. Our continued focus is on benchmarking to higher salaries for staff, as was done in the CBHC model.

We have and will continue to use the momentum created through the CBHC service and payment design to advocate for long overdue investment across the behavioral healthcare system. Without a strong system with a healthy and valued workforce, the great promise of access to high quality behavioral healthcare close-to-home will not be realized.

As always, we thank our members for your engagement and expertise upon which ABH relies to advocate successfully on your behalf.

# Save the Date!

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DREAM...BELIEVE...ACHIEVE

**Friday, October 21st, 2022 from 9:00am - 2:00pm**  
**Sheraton Framingham Hotel & Conference Center**

ABH's Salute to Excellence has traditionally been a celebratory day when we recognize individuals and groups, often clinical and direct care staff, who have made outstanding contributions to community-based behavioral healthcare in Massachusetts. ABH is extremely excited to announce that this year, we will be resuming our all-day, in-person celebration.

Stay tuned this summer for additional details, including awardee nomination forms. The formal event invitation will follow soon.

**Questions?** Please feel free to contact Meg Socha at [msocha@abhmass.org](mailto:msocha@abhmass.org).

## RFR for Qualified Vendors to Serve as MassHealth Community Partners

EOHHS has issued its Request for Responses (RFR) to solicit responses from Behavioral Health Community Partners (BH CPs) and Long-Term Services and Supports Community Partners (LTSS CPs) to create a pool of "Qualified Vendors" from which Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) may select with which to subcontract.

Please find the bid solicitation and all applicable materials on COMMBUYS here: <https://www.commbuys.com/bso/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-23-1039-EHS01-EHS01-77253&external=true&parentUrl=bid>

## Interesting Reads

- [As overdose deaths exploded during the pandemic, racial disparities widened, CDC report shows. STAT.](#)
- [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver \(HBO\)](#) (Cites ABH Outpatient Survey).
- [What are the Implications of Long COVID for Employment and Health Coverage? Kaiser Family Foundation.](#)
- [Congress is about to act on drug price reform. Here's what you need to know. NPR.](#)