



Maryland
Hospital Association

MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IT'S TIME TO TURN THE TIDE ON THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS

THE ISSUE

There is a crisis in our state that an estimated one in five Marylanders face daily: substance use disorders and mental illness – chronic diseases that know no boundaries and that represent our greatest health care challenge as a state.

This crisis is devastating for all Marylanders. From 2012 to 2016, drug- and alcohol-related intoxication deaths spiked by 161 percent. In 2016, nearly 2,100 lives were claimed by drug or alcohol intoxication, a number that doesn't begin capture the emotional, physical, or financial toll that addiction exacts on families, individuals, and businesses.

Resources for those seeking help are strained. The few dedicated behavioral health facilities in Maryland routinely operate near or above capacity and community-based resources are stretched to the limit. Three state psychiatric facilities have closed in the past decade and since 1981, the number of state psychiatric hospital beds has decreased 80 percent. Now, psychiatric beds in acute-care hospitals operate at 99.9 percent capacity.

This crunch means those in need often end up in hospital emergency departments, where behavioral health patients spend at least three hours more than other patients. From 2013 to 2016, hospital emergency department visits by behavioral health patients increased 18 percent while *all other visits* declined by 8 percent. Additionally, a shortage of behavioral health care providers and funding issues have exacerbated the problem.

Maryland's unique health care system, where hospitals work to deliver the right care, at the right time, in the right setting, means fixing this problem will take a united effort across the continuum of care. Mental health and substance use disorders are treatable health conditions and should receive the same level of urgency as other medical conditions. Anything less runs counter to the duty of Maryland's leaders to serve the most vulnerable among us.

WHAT HOSPITALS ARE FOR

MHA supports a comprehensive approach to create a sustainable behavioral health care delivery system that puts patients first and is guided by evidence-based treatment practices. This entails the development of new high-quality providers and community networks, along with support for current providers, to strengthen Maryland's behavioral health workforce and expand access to crisis services. To accomplish this, legislators must:

- Ensure appropriate reimbursement for behavioral health care providers
- Reduce regulatory barriers to increasing behavioral health care capacity

