



Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 524-Maryland Medical Assistance Program-Telemedicine Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

SB 524 would require the Maryland Department of Health's Medicaid Telehealth Program, under some circumstances, to approve psychiatric nurse practitioners to provide Assertive Community Treatment or mobile treatment services to certain Maryland Medical Assistance Program recipients in the types of providers eligible to receive reimbursement for health care services that are delivered through telemedicine and provided to program recipients.

MHA Position

There is a crisis in our state, faced by an estimated one in five Marylanders: mental health and substance use disorders. These chronic conditions affect people of all ages, including senior citizens and children, and across the socio-economic spectrum. Behavioral health conditions — mental health and substance use disorders — know no barriers, and they represent perhaps our greatest collective health challenge as a state and as a nation. How Maryland's health and policy leaders respond to this challenge will determine whether health care providers can continue to deliver efficient, effective, high-quality care.

Integrating physical and behavioral health services throughout and across the continuum of care, while partnering with community stakeholders to expand access to appropriate behavioral health services in the least restrictive setting, can help hospitals and health systems achieve Triple Aim goals. There is widespread agreement that hospitals cannot — and should not — be the primary providers for patients with chronic diseases; however, for patients presenting in hospital emergency departments with behavioral health concerns, this is often the case. The preferred approach when a patient presents in an acute care hospital is that hospitals work with community-based partners to ensure patients continue behavioral health treatment plans.

To address gaps in behavioral health care service delivery, the state needs to think innovatively about how care can be delivered. A recent report to the General Assembly on hospital emergency room discharge protocols refers to several telehealth programs, funded by specific contracts and small grants. The report finds that increasing the use of and reimbursement for telehealth services would help expand access to community-based treatment more systematically.

Maryland's hospitals believe a robust telehealth network is a necessary component of any comprehensive plan to address Maryland's gaps in access to behavioral health care.

Under Maryland's unique Total Cost of Care agreement with the federal government, Maryland's hospitals are working to lower costs and improve population health. In addition to treating illness

and injury, hospitals are reaching out beyond their four walls to keep people well and improve the health of the communities they serve.

By allowing flexibility for psychiatric nurse practitioners to coordinate care with other care team members within an Assertive Community Treatment or mobile model via telehealth, Maryland can optimize the care that can be delivered to more patients. This bill helps bring behavioral health care into the 21st century by enabling behavioral health care professionals to deliver care efficiently and effectively to the greatest number of patients possible.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable report* for Senate Bill 524.