

Terry McAuliffe Mental Health Forum Responses

Opening Statement:

Thank you to all of the organizations that sponsored the event – there’s a long list and I’ve only got a short time, but I value all of your work.

Thousands and thousands of Virginians are struggling with mental health issues, and, as Governor, I am going to make mental health services one of my top priorities.

Mental health services are a critical part of Virginia’s healthcare and public safety services, and recent events in Newtown, Aurora, Oak Creek, and Virginia Tech have all shown us that we need to take serious steps to continue to improve our mental health services. Beyond increasing safety, improvements in our mental health programs can save us money and improve the quality of life for thousands of Virginians and their friends and family. People and families continue to face high stigma when it comes to dealing with mental illness and we all need to do a better job of addressing it.

In April, I outlined my platform on mental health and it was designed to make clear that our mental health system should be able to support a full continuum of care – from a sufficient crisis response to intense community services and ultimately to recovery-focused care leading to independence. By keeping mental health patients in their homes and jobs and out of institutions or the legal system we can save money and improve lives.

Perhaps the most concrete choice that the next governor will face is on whether to accept federal funding for Medicaid expansion. This is Virginia taxpayer money that will go to other states if we don’t accept it. If we do, we can expand coverage, including for mental health care, and create over 30,000 jobs.

It’s the right thing to do morally and the right thing to do for Virginia. I look forward to your questions today.

Questions and Answers:

Question #1

Virginians of all ages and situations in life can experience mental health problems. Here are just a few examples:

- Almost a quarter million adults in Virginia live with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.
- As many as 18% of adults older than 65 in the U.S. experience depression.
- Almost 1 in 4 of Virginia’s jail inmates live with a mental health disorder.

- 28,000 individuals are treated for brain injuries in Virginia hospitals each year.
- The national rate of post-deployment mental health problems among returning veterans is about 15-20% at any given time.

Given this concerning snapshot of mental health in Virginia, what is your overall vision for the Commonwealth's mental health system?

Overall, I believe we need a mental health system that provides the full continuum of care for all Virginians. To get there, we need to do a few really important things:

- 1. Increase resources for Crisis Intervention Training for public safety officers. Making sure that all of our law enforcement agencies have enough personnel trained to deal with mental health emergencies just makes sense.**
- 2. Incentivize the creation of more and higher capacity crisis stabilization units. Once a public safety officer has de-escalated a mental health crisis, they need to be able to transport the citizen in crisis to a nearby crisis stabilization unit.**
- 3. Increase resources for and personnel performing intensive case management – particularly for children. Our dedicated case managers deserve our gratitude for handling as many cases per person as they do, but it's simply too much to ensure that every citizen needing their support gets it.**
- 4. Improve the quantity and quality of long-term supportive housing for severely mentally ill and homeless citizens. Housing services and supports are integral components in the community-based systems of care for individuals with serious mental illness and there is a direct correlation between psychiatric stability and stable housing. I visited the diversion program in Alexandria just last week, and hearing their commitment to keeping folks out of jail was inspiring. Everyone around the table, from the CSBs to the Police and Sheriffs office all agreed that we can and should be doing more to keep our mentally ill citizens out of jail and in treatment.**
- 5. Improve accountability and effectiveness within the system.**
- 6. Fill the gap on Veterans' mental health services.**

Question #2

Research on child development shows that the foundation for sound mental health is built early in life, prior to age 3, as the brain is going through a period of rapid development. Even at an early age, children can experience significant mental health problems. Knowing this, what would you propose to support the emotional development of Virginia's young children and to provide access to early childhood mental health services for families?

As I said above, I think the critical state policy piece here is increasing the amount of support we've got going to all of our case managers, but particularly those who are working with children. Through the CSBs and other service providers we can specify that early childhood and childhood mental health services should be a priority.

There's a key policy difference between my opponent and me on healthcare that feeds directly into this question and healthcare provision broadly. By accepting Medicaid expansion, which will bring \$21 billion new healthcare dollars to the Commonwealth, create over 30,000 jobs, and provide coverage for around 400,000 Virginians, we can increase mental health coverage for many of our citizens.

Along with the direct healthcare expansion that will come from Medicaid expansion and the accompanying federal funds, we will free up hundreds of millions of new general fund dollars. We can put some of that money to work actually expanding services and improving delivery systems for Virginians. It's not enough to promise good mental healthcare - I want to actually invest in the mental health of our children.

Question #3

Depression has a significant impact on adolescent development and well being; it can adversely affect school and work performance, impair peer and family relationships, and worsen the severity of other health conditions such as asthma and obesity. The most recent Virginia Youth Survey found that 1 in 4 high school students surveyed reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row, such that they stopped doing some usual activities. Almost 17% of them reported seriously considering suicide. Despite the prevalence of these problems, Virginia does not have a sufficient number of trained children's mental health providers, including child psychiatrists. This can leave school nurses, counselors and pediatricians trying to meet an overwhelming need, and parents confused about how to get help. What would you do as governor to make high quality mental health care for children more accessible for Virginia's families, regardless of any payment source they might have or not have?

First and foremost we need to ensure that, for those without the ability to afford it, there are mental health services available, particularly for children. Beyond those services, I believe we also need to address the critical underfunding our school systems have been dealing with for the past several years.

Often the first cuts to be made are in support staff like school counselors or mental health specialists. I would work as governor to avoid putting our school systems in the position to be forced to eliminate these critically important staff positions, which can act as the early warning and first response system for our kids. Beyond that, we need to ensure that those state services providers who work with kids are fully and seamlessly connected with our school systems. If a school knows there's an issue with a student, it should be able to connect that student to additional support - we can't let our kids fall through the cracks.

I was pleased that there has been a bipartisan effort to improve children's crisis services over the past couple of years. That's important because this area of the system was dramatically underfunded and it had a big impact on kids and families. Having these crisis services available is important because children and families need help the moment they reach out for it – not 3 or 4 months down the road. Early intervention goes a long way in preventing high costs later in a child's life in terms of juvenile justice system involvement. I look forward to working with stakeholders on identifying ways like this to continue improving the children's mental health system.

Question #4

In Virginia there are fifty-nine counties and ten cities which are designated as geographic Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas, meaning there are not enough mental health professionals for the geographic area or the particular demographic population. The 2012 comprehensive state plan issued by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services showed that there are 5,716 adults and children in need of mental health services who are on a waiting list. This number is actually a conservative estimate because the waiting list only spans a 4-month period, from January to April. If you are elected, what will you do to remedy the shortage of mental health professionals in Virginia?

We know that Medicaid Expansion will create over 30,000 jobs and we're going to need people to fill them. We need to ensure that this growing segment of our economy has the talent it needs. Virginia's community college system will be our primary focus as we expand workforce training, but we also need to work with our hospitals and the federal government to increase residency slots and keep Virginia-trained doctors in Virginia – including mental health providers.

Further, we need to do a better job across all sectors of the healthcare economy incentivizing doctors and other healthcare providers to move to underserved areas. This can be done through a combination of grants, scholarships, loan repayment programs, and targeted recruitment incentives for our education system.

Question #5

A national report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness has shown that if Virginia were to opt to expand Medicaid up to 138% of the federal poverty level, as allowed under the Affordable Care Act, an estimated 80,000 adults in Virginia who have mental health disorders and are currently uninsured would gain insurance coverage. Given that Medicaid expansion is one major strategy to provide health insurance and thus health care to this population of vulnerable Virginians, do you support Medicaid expansion? Regardless of your position on Medicaid expansion, if Medicaid is not expanded how would you propose extending mental health treatment to these individuals?

I've talked about this a lot already, but let me be clear: I am 100% in favor of expanding Medicaid. The federal government will cover 100% of the cost for the first three years and 90% of the cost thereafter. Our federal taxes will stay the same

whether we expand or not, but if we expand we can bring \$21 billion of our tax dollars back to Virginia, expanding lifesaving coverage for around 400,000 Virginians and creating over 30,000 jobs. Every single budget I submit to the General Assembly will include an expanded Medicaid program.

My opponent will not expand Medicaid and has made his opposition clear.

Question #6

The need for safe, stable housing is a critical issue for people with serious mental illness; without access to housing, the effectiveness of treatment is greatly diminished. From 2010 to 2013 there was a 16% decrease in rates of homelessness among Virginia's vulnerable populations, including those with mental illness experiencing chronic homelessness. What would you do as governor to ensure that this positive trend continues?

As Governor I will work hard to improve the quantity and quality of long-term supportive housing for severely mentally ill and homeless citizens. Housing services and supports are integral components in the community-based systems of care for individuals with serious mental illness and there is a direct correlation between psychiatric stability and stable housing. This form of treatment is less expensive than mental health institutions or imprisonment, and leads to dramatically improved outcomes. We need to provide both transitional and long-term supportive housing units so we can keep our citizens and veterans off the streets and in settings where they can receive the care they need.

Closing Statement:

As governor I will work with all of the passionate and dedicated people within this room and the mental health community to promote recovery and improve the quality of life of Virginians struggling with mental illness. Through increased support, improved education, and collective advocacy we can build a mental health system we can all be proud of. One of the biggest choices we face is accepting the federal expansion of Medicaid – its something I am completely supportive of.

I can't do it alone though – I need the support of every person in this room. Not just during the campaign, but throughout my term in office. I want to complete my fourth year as governor in a Virginia where all people affected by mental illness get the help, hope, and support that they need. I hope you'll all join me in that effort.