



## **Children's Mental Health Budget Priorities**

*We call on the General Assembly to support these priority budget amendments*

### **1. Alternative Transportation System for Children and Adults in Mental Health Crisis—**

***(Item 311 #2h Patron: Watts; Item 311 #1s Patron: Hanger; Item 311 #3h Patron: Garrett & Item 303 #4s Patron: Dunnivant)***

- In Virginia, children and adults experiencing a mental health crisis are often transported to a mental health facility by law enforcement under a temporary detention order (TDO). During transport, children are frequently handcuffed and sometimes shackled in the back of a police car. This criminalization of children's crises often results in traumatization, stigmatization, and can compromise treatment.
- A recent alternative transportation pilot project in Southwest Virginia demonstrated that adults in mental health crisis can be safely transported to the hospital without the use of law enforcement. This pilot produced positive patient outcome and provided relief to law enforcement.
- Endorsed by law enforcement, mental health advocacy organizations, and was a recommendation from the SJ47 Joint Subcommittee, please support a budget package that builds on the success of the Southwest Virginia pilot and includes funding to develop and implement a statewide, recovery-focused alternative transportation system for individuals under a TDO.

### **2. STEP-VA: Continue implementation of STEP-VA, the plan for improving statewide community- based mental health services for all ages (Governor's Introduced Budget)**

- Over the past several years, Virginia has made significant improvements in the quality and accountability of community mental health services through legislative efforts. However, Virginia's overall behavioral health system remains underfunded, fragmented, and uncoordinated.
- STEP-VA is a roadmap for how Virginia will transform its behavioral health system. It aims to ensure that every community has the capacity to provide integrated behavioral health services to people of all ages, including children.
- In 2017, Gov. McAuliffe and the General Assembly signaled their commitment to STEP-VA by providing \$4.9 million in general fund dollars to implement same-day access to mental health services at 18 of the 40 community services boards (CSBs). The governor's and General Assembly's funding support of STEP-VA is a first step in translating the vision of a reformed behavioral health system into reality.
- **Please support a budget package that implements the next phase of STEP-VA by fully funding same-day access and primary-care-screening services at all 40 CSBs.**

### 3. Medicaid Expansion

**Since 2014, Virginia legislators have rejected the opportunity to provide affordable health insurance to hardworking Virginians. With expanded Medicaid, nearly 400,000 low-income Virginia adults could gain coverage.** Most of these individuals are in a health coverage “gap”. They are uninsured and ineligible for existing health insurance programs. The new coverage would be largely supported with federal funds from the Affordable Care Act, paying 94% of the cost in 2018 and reducing to 90% in 2020 and after.

**By closing the gap, Virginia could save state dollars and improve the delivery of mental health and substance use disorder services.**

- Adults – including transition age youth who are 19 and 20 years old, the age when many mental illnesses begin – would benefit greatly by having health insurance to provide access to needed treatment for their mental health needs.
- In an attempt to address the opioid crisis, Virginia has developed an impressive array of Medicaid benefits ([ARTS](#)) to treat those with substance use disorders, but few adults who are addicted to substances can access that treatment because so few currently are eligible for Medicaid.
- Virginia is in the process of transforming its entire behavioral health system – through the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the 40 community services boards (CSBs) – to provide a consistent array of high quality services in all areas of the state through its [STEP-VA plan](#). Without the significant infusion of federal Medicaid dollars through expansion, however, it will take many years to implement STEP-VA. Meanwhile, Virginians – both adults AND children – will continue to lack access to critical behavioral health services because Virginia does not have adequate general fund dollars to build out the necessary array of services.

By improving Medicaid coverage, each month Virginia could save \$5.7 million in state dollars now spent on hospital indigent care, mental health services, family planning and other state-funded health programs. Those savings would offset new costs, resulting in an **official NET state-savings estimate of \$138 million in general funds during fiscal years 2019 and 2020.**