

Mental Health Advocacy

2025 Priorities

1. Address Critical Behavioral Health Workforce Needs

Virginia ranks 39th nationally in access to a trained mental health workforce. Essential care is delayed or not available for people in need.

Attract and retain a diverse and culturally responsive behavioral health workforce in all settings and all related disciplines.

- a. **Support financial incentives** - Paid Internships, Clinical Supervision Hours, Student Loan Repayment Programs, and Scholarships.
- b. **Decrease administrative burdens** - Improve licensure accessibility; Increase Medicaid payment rates for mental health providers.
- c. **Revise “Barrier Crime” Restrictions to employment** - Amend current laws to provide safe opportunities for otherwise qualified individuals to join the workforce.

2. Fully Fund Crisis Services and Community Supports

Virginians in a mental health crisis are waiting long hours in emergency rooms before getting treatment, if at all. The right community care reduces overuse of emergency rooms and jails.

- a. **Ensure that all Virginians have access to an evidence-based continuum of care in their communities.**
 1. **Fully fund the Right Help, Right Now plan** for a full complement of community care services.
 2. **Priority services** should include mobile crisis units, crisis receiving centers and stabilization units, supportive housing, and peer wellness stay programs.
- b. **Increase discharge planning in hospitals and jails** for persons with serious mental illness and include connecting with housing and community care.
- c. **Provide incentives for private hospitals to accept more individuals in a TDO mental health crisis.**
- d. **Clarify that officers have discretion to delay jailing someone in a mental health crisis** and take them to an available crisis treatment facility first.

3. Address Behavioral Health Challenges in Youth

Depression and self-harm incidents among Virginia youth have increased dramatically.

- a. **Fund School-Based Mental Health Integration:** Integrating community-based mental health providers into schools expands access to care, and alleviates the burden on school professionals.
- b. **Ensure all school divisions have the technical support needed to bill for Medicaid and compensate mental health providers**, including community-based providers and school-based staff.