

Virginia drops out of program to improve mental health services

The Virginia Department of Behavioral Care and Development Services has abandoned a pilot program that would have significantly expanded access to services for people seeking mental health help at eight of the state's 40 public treatment centers, known as community service boards (CSBs).

State officials said the expansion was too costly and ambitious.

Instead, the state is working on a plan to make changes at all 40 community services boards, saving money by spreading the reforms over the next decade. The CSBs function as the front line for Virginians in need of mental health treatment, especially those in crisis.

Lawmakers and the department officials charged with administering the public mental health system agree that there is a serious need for change.

Jack Barber, M.D., commissioner of the Department of Behavioral Care

and Development Services, told the *Richmond Times Dispatch* that the state needs to move toward a system that allows people experiencing a mental health crisis to be seen the same day they walk into a CSB for help, not weeks or months later, when it may be too late.

Virginia lawmakers are facing a \$1.48 billion revenue shortfall and Barber said it will be difficult to obtain more money for the CSBs in the immediate future.

Mental Health America ranked Virginia 38th among states in terms of the prevalence of mental illnesses and the ability access care. The state ranked 49th among states for the share of its youth – 75 percent – who do not receive treatment for depression.

Karen Cameron, health care director with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, urged lawmakers to consider expanding Medicaid to thousands of uninsured Virginians so they can get help before they are in crisis. Medicaid expansion is a politically sensitive issue in Virginia. Gov. Terry McAuliffe is a staunch proponent of expansion, but the Republicans in the state legislature have blocked his efforts to pass it.

Virginia was part of a pilot program involving 24 states administered by the federal government to study enhancing services for the mentally ill. Virginia decided to drop out of the program when it became evident that the state's community-based system is underfunded and it would be too costly to implement the program.

Brochures



Questions and Answers about Clinical Hypnosis



Questions and Answers about Clinical Psychologists and Psychological Health Care

osis"

Healthcare"

these aspects