

ENHANCE COUNTIES' ABILITY TO PREVENT AND TREAT MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your members of Congress to maintain consistent funding for substance abuse and mental health services provided through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and pass legislation that enhances counties' ability to provide local systems of care. Future appropriations bills should meet or exceed FY 2021 funding levels, particularly for the Community Mental Health Services (MHBG) and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grants, which allow counties to direct resources to those with the most need.

BACKGROUND:

America's 3,069 counties are integral to the nation's behavioral health system. Counties annually invest more than \$80 billion in community health systems, including behavioral health services, and county-based behavioral health services exist in 23 states that represent 75 percent of the U.S. population. Through 750 behavioral health authorities and community providers, county governments plan and operate community-based services for persons with mental illnesses and substance abuse conditions. Counties also help finance Medicaid, the largest source of funding for behavioral health services in the U.S., and serve as the local safety net, administering wrap-around human services supports.

SAMHSA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), administers programs such as the Community Mental Health Services (MHBG) and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grants, which help counties provide direct behavioral services to those individuals in most need. Such services improve community well-being, reduce counties' health care and justice system costs and provide savings to local taxpayers.

COUNTY-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES EXIST IN 23 STATES THAT REPRESENT 75 PERCENT OF THE U.S. POPULATION.

COUNTY GOVERNMENTS PLAN AND OPERATE COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE CONDITIONS.

COUNTIES HELP FINANCE MEDICAID, THE LARGEST SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE U.S., AND SERVE AS THE LOCAL SAFETY NET, ADMINISTERING WRAP-AROUND HUMAN SERVICES SUPPORTS.

IN 2020, OVER 40 MILLION (15 PERCENT) OF ADULTS IN THE U.S. REPORTED HAVING A SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDER.

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Mental and behavioral health disorders remain prevalent and largely untreated. One in five adults in the U.S. experience a mental illness, with less than half receiving treatment. One in twenty experience a serious mental illness, with only two-thirds receiving treatment. In 2020, over 40 million Americans (15 percent) reported having a substance use disorder, with again less than half receiving treatment, and only 6% of those needing both mental health and substance abuse treatment received services for both. As of 2021, nearly 37 percent of the U.S. population, or 122 million American lived in areas experiencing mental health professional shortages, with approximately two-thirds of these shortages in rural or partially rural areas.

COVID-19 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING:

COVID-19 and the ongoing substance use disorder crisis in our nation has further heightened the need for additional federal resources and reforms to help counties prevent, treat and provide recovery services for individuals with substance use disorders. Congress provided emergency appropriations for mental health and substance abuse services across the board in COVID-19 relief packages passed in 2020 and 2021 including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (P.L. 116-260), and the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2) to respond to the impact of the pandemic and mental and behavioral health. This the combined total of FY21 appropriations and emergency supplemental appropriations amounts to \$1.2 billion for the Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs) program, \$3.15 billion in both SAPT funding and MHBG funding.

KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Congress should meet or exceed FY 2021 appropriation and supplemental levels for the Community and Mental Health Services (MHBG) Block Grant in future appropriations.** The MHBG is the principal federal discretionary program supporting community-based mental health services for adults and children. Counties may use block grant dollars to provide a range of services for adults and children with serious mental illnesses, including employment and housing assistance, case management (including Assertive Community Treatment), school-based support services, family and parenting education and peer support. The MHBG received a total of \$736.5 million in the FY 2021 appropriations bill passed by Congress in December 2020 and a total of \$850 million in emergency appropriations throughout FY 2021.
- **Congress should meet or exceed FY 2021 appropriation and supplemental levels for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant in future appropriations.** County behavioral health authorities use the SAPT block grant to serve vulnerable, low-income populations, such as those with HIV/AIDS, pregnant and parenting women, youth and others by ensuring access to substance abuse services. An independent 2009 study of the SAPT block grant found that the program produces positive outcomes, including increased abstinence from alcohol and other drugs, increased employment and decreased criminal justice involvement. SAPT received \$1.9 billion in the FY 2021 appropriations bill enacted by Congress in December 2021 and a total of \$1.7 billion in



emergency appropriations throughout FY 2021.

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