

# TEXAS STATE of MIND™

THE MEADOWS MENTAL HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE

## 85th Regular Legislative Session: Improving the Texas State of Mind

Since our public launch in 2014, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute has helped Texas legislators, state officials, members of the judiciary, and local leaders identify systemic mental health needs and solutions, quickly becoming Texas's most trusted source for data-driven mental health policy.

In three short years, the Institute has begun to make significant impact in multiple areas, helping Texas leaders expand the mental health workforce, improve access to care for veterans and their families, shift the focus of new investments toward early intervention, and address the mental health crisis in our jails and emergency rooms. We have furthered these goals with objective, trustworthy data and policy analysis, firmly establishing a reputation as nonpartisan, pragmatic, and effective through two legislative sessions.

While much work is left to be done, the 85th Legislative Session saw mental health issues assume a large focus, resulting in strong progress toward smarter, more effective mental health policy in Texas.

### Mental Health Statistics

3 in 4



Texans have a friend or family member with mental health needs

2/3



of people with a diagnosable mental illness do not seek treatment

1/2



Approximately half of all mental illnesses begin by age 14



\$2.2 Billion

Local Texas governments spend \$2.2 Billion annually on unmet mental health needs



\$461 Million

Jail costs for individuals with mental illness = \$461 Million per year

### Transforming Texas State Hospitals

Deteriorating conditions at Texas' state hospitals have made headlines for years, highlighting the desperate need for significant repairs and improvements. The 2018-2019 budget, **SB 1**, includes \$66.3 million to provide critical repairs and perform maintenance that had been deferred for years. In addition, \$300 million was set aside for the planning and implementation of new state hospital construction projects that will modernize the treatment of mental illness, closer to where people live. Money for these projects was funded via an appropriation from the Economic Stabilization Fund, which remains one of the strongest "rainy day" funds in the country. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is required to put together a three-phase state hospital construction plan for the current and future biennia.

- Increasing state hospital and community psychiatric bed capacity
- Expanding maximum security forensic capacity
- Reducing recidivism and waiting lists
- Expanding or establishing partnerships with health-related institutions and other health care providers, such as medical schools



## Advancing Smart Justice

The 85th Legislature embraced a smart justice approach to those with mental illness who repeatedly cycle through our jails and emergency departments. **SB 292 (Huffman, Nelson, Schwertner)** allocates an additional \$37.5 million to create a grant program to reduce recidivism, arrest, and incarceration among individuals with mental illness. This program will fund jail diversion and other best practices in local communities to address the intersection of criminal justice and mental illness at the local level. Many counties, including Bexar, Dallas, Fort Bend, Harris, and others, are in a prime position to make real change through these grants. Several other bills embrace a smart justice approach.

- **SB 344 (West)** enables emergency medical services personnel to provide transport to mental health facilities in cases deemed safe by a peace officer.
- **HB 337 (Collier)** allows county sheriffs the option of notifying the Health and Human Services Commission to suspend, not cancel, a person's Medicaid benefits while in confinement, with benefits restored -- in most cases -- upon their release.
- **SB 1326 (Zaffirini)** puts into law recommendations from the Texas Judicial Council's Mental Health Committee affecting the criminal and judicial process for individuals with mental illness who are charged with crimes.

## Responding to Our Workforce Crisis

With Texas' population booming, more help is needed, but far too many mental health professionals moving from out of state face significant delays and red tape before they can be licensed to practice in Texas. **SB 674 (Schwertner)** creates a fast-track licensure option for out-of-state psychiatrists, cutting the amount of time before they could begin helping Texans. Other workforce initiatives were also established.

- **HB 1486 (Price)** establishes training and certification requirements for peer specialists, and authorizes Medicaid reimbursement for their services.
- **HB 3083 (Price)** and **HB 3808 (Clardy)** expanded qualified classes of providers now eligible for the state's Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals, established in 2015. Chemical dependency counselors as well as licensed marriage and family therapists are now eligible for available funds.

## Intervening Earlier for Texas Children

Bureaucratic red tape has made it more difficult than necessary for Texas providers to help children with high needs. **SB 74 (Nelson)** streamlined the credentialing process for these providers, meaning the children of our state will have more access to behavioral health services in the years to come. Several other bills also help expand care for Texas children and their families.

- **HB 1600 (Thompson)** provides reimbursement for adolescent mental health screenings, meaning more children with needs will be identified -- and helped -- earlier.
- **HB 2466 (Davis)** provides reimbursement under Medicaid and CHIP for a maternal depression screening for mothers within their children's first year.
- **SB 1 (State Budget)** included a \$2 million grant program, related to SB 74, to increase capacity for intensive services for high needs children in the child welfare system.

## Developing Community-Focused Solutions

Every Texas city, town and community is unique, and each has different needs and local resources to address mental health of their populations. **HB 13 (Price)** created a \$30 million grant program to provide incentives for state-local collaborations to help Texas communities tailor solutions to fit the mental health challenges they face. Other crucial legislation was also created.

- **HB 10 (Price)** expands the state's parity enforcement authority to ensure that mental health coverage is treated the same as physical health coverage. It also establishes an ombudsman position to ensure access to behavioral health care services.
- **SB 1 (State Budget)** renewed the state's \$20 million commitment to the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance grant program over the next biennium. It further allocated \$62.7 million in funding to help eliminate waiting lists for community mental health services for adults and children and address equity issues between local mental health authorities.