

2023 Issue Paper: Behavioral Health

Position Statement

In the LWVUS publication, “Impact on Issues”, the LWVUS states that “all people should have access to affordable, quality in-patient and out-patient behavioral healthcare, including needed medication and support services.” It goes on to say that “behavioral healthcare should be integrated with, and at parity with, physical healthcare. There should be early and affordable diagnosis and treatment for behavioral health problems for youth from early childhood through adolescence. This should be family focused and community based”. In addition, “persons with behavioral health challenges should have access to safe and stable housing, including those who are chronically homeless”. The League supports “effective re-entry planning and follow-up for people released from behavioral health hospitalization and the criminal justice system, as well as mental health and drug courts that provide needed treatment and avoid inappropriate entry into the criminal justice system.” The LWVUS believes that “health education throughout life should integrate all aspects of social, emotional, and physical health and wellness and they support efforts to reduce stigmatization of behavioral health problems and care.”

Recent History of Behavioral Health Legislation

During the 2022 Legislative Session several behavioral health bills were passed and signed into law. Among these were bills that

- Provide partial hospitalization and intensive outpatient services for youth (**SB 5736**),
- Increase access to information about behavioral health services for youth by establishing a parental portal for parents of youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (**HB 1800**),
- Establish and fund minimum numbers of school nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors based on the number of students and school educational level (elementary, middle, or secondary, **HB 1664**), and
- Facilitate telehealth behavioral health services and increase availability of these services by participating in the psychology interjurisdictional compact. The compact allows psychologists to provide telehealth services across state borders in states that are participating in the compact (**HB 1286**).

Another bill, **SB 5884**, passed in the Senate, but did not make it out of the House Health Care & Wellness Committee. This bill would have established a paraprofessional profession, behavioral health support specialist, someone who would practice in partnership with a licensed behavioral health professional, thus increasing the behavioral health workforce.

Summary of Issues for the 2023 Legislative Session

The upcoming legislative session will be the first year of the legislative biennium, 2023-2024. Important behavioral health issues for this session include:

- Increasing the behavioral health workforce.
- Increasing access to behavioral health services in underserved areas and for underserved populations.
- Providing behavioral health services in locations convenient and familiar to persons who might need those services, places such as schools and physicians' offices.
- Ensuring access to behavioral health services at every level across the spectrum of services, from preventative care to inpatient hospitalization.

Support of specific legislation will depend on the bills introduced during the session.

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