



## **2020 Policy and Legislative Priorities**

### **1. Increase Access to Community Based Mental Health Care**

All Virginians with mental health issues deserve access to community-based care that is person-centered, trauma-informed, evidence-based, timely, affordable, and delivered as early as possible.

- *Recognizing that “Housing is Health Care,” support efforts to ensure that all Virginians with mental health needs have affordable, safe, and stable housing and the support necessary to maintain their housing.*
- *Support the work of the joint Community Mental Health Service System Redesign Taskforce and other efforts to develop a full continuum of person-centered, trauma-informed community services across Virginia that are easily accessible, and adequately reimbursed by Medicaid.*
- *Support measures to ensure that private health insurance plans offer equal access to mental health and addiction treatment as they do to physical healthcare.*
- *Ensure that all Virginians wanting treatment for substance use disorder can begin treatment at an appropriate level of care within 24 hours.*

### **2. Decriminalize Mental Illness and Address the Needs of People with Mental Health Challenges in the Criminal Justice System**

Many Virginians who need mental health services are instead arrested and incarcerated. All localities should screen for diversion at the earliest stage of the criminal justice process. For those who are confined, services must be timely, professional and based on individual needs.

- *Support law enforcement officers and prosecutors in using appropriate discretion when considering charges against a person with a serious mental illness, and oppose laws that effectively criminalize homelessness.*
- *Support interventions shown to reduce interactions with the criminal justice system.*
- *Support the development of pre-plea mental health dockets across the state for misdemeanor and felony defendants with a mental illness.*
- *Support establishing minimum standards for mental health care in Virginia’s local and regional jails and the development of data sharing agreements necessary to ensure access to and continuity of care between jail and community-based organizations.*
- *Support appropriate use of the Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity defense.*
- *In capital cases when death or life in prison are the sentencing options, exclude from eligibility for the death penalty those who suffer from severe mental illness at the time of their crime.*

### **3. Expand Opportunities for Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists**

Peer support is an evidence-based service that reduces crisis relapse and increases successful community engagement.

- *Encourage public and private agencies throughout the continuum of care to include peer support.*
- *Encourage third-party reimbursement of services provided by Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists in health care, supportive housing, employment, criminal justice and other settings.*
- *Require a minimum wage of \$15/hour for Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists.*

(continued)



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### **4. Endorse Effective Strategies for Reducing Suicide**

Every eight hours a Virginian dies by suicide and suicide is the second leading cause of death among Virginians 15-34 years of age.

- *Support efforts to restrict access to lethal means, including Extreme Risk Protection Orders.*
- *Encourage responsible media guidelines for articles related to suicide.*
- *Encourage primary care physicians to include depression and suicide risk screening as part of every patient contact.*

### **5. Protect the Civil Liberties of People with a Mental Illness**

People living with a mental illness, even when experiencing a crisis, are entitled to due process and equal treatment under the law.

- *Oppose any extension of the expiration time for Emergency Custody Orders, with few exceptions. Special exceptions could include extension up to 24 hours if: The individual is in a complicated medical or detox condition, or at a facility with trauma-informed psychiatric care and admission to the unit for less than 24 hours could prevent a temporary detention order.*
- *Support increased funding and creative solutions to discharge all civilly committed Virginians in state hospitals waiting on the extraordinary barriers to discharge list.*