

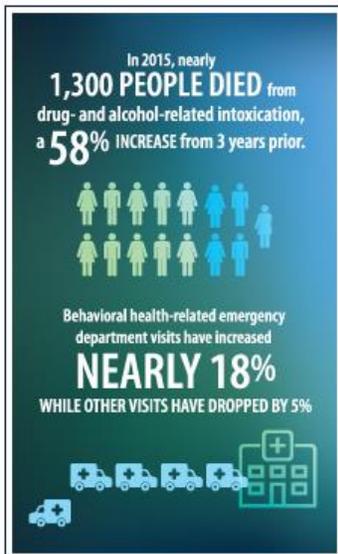


Maryland
Hospital Association

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: MARYLAND'S GREAT CHALLENGE RIGHT CARE AT THE RIGHT TIME IN THE RIGHT SETTING

THE ISSUE

There is a crisis in our state, one that 1.5 million Marylanders face: substance use disorders and mental illness. Those suffering with these ailments are senior citizens, adults and children. They are rich, poor and middle class. They are Republicans, Democrats and unaffiliated. Behavioral health diseases know no barriers, and they represent perhaps our greatest collective challenge as a state and as a nation.



In Maryland, from 2012 to 2015, drug- and alcohol-related intoxication deaths spiked by 58 percent. In 2015 alone, nearly 1,300 lives were claimed by drug or alcohol intoxication, a number that doesn't even begin to capture the emotional, physical, or financial toll that addiction exacts on families, individuals, and businesses.

The few dedicated behavioral health facilities in Maryland (three state psychiatric hospitals have closed in the past decade) routinely operate near or above capacity. Community-based resources like clinics and individual mental health providers are stretched to the limit (in 2014, just 14 percent of the psychiatrists listed on Maryland's health exchange were accepting new patients and were available for an appointment within 45 days).

Behavioral health patients unable to get the ongoing care they need often end up in crisis in emergency departments. From 2013 to 2015, emergency department visits by people with behavioral health needs jumped by 18 percent while all other emergency department visits dropped by more than 5 percent. Patients can remain for days or weeks in hospitals, waiting for space in more appropriate settings to open up. And when space does open up, it is often many miles from their homes.

Mental health and substance use disorders are long-term, chronic, but treatable health conditions and deserve the same attention as any other medical condition. Unfortunately, a shortage of qualified behavioral health practitioners and unstable funding have hampered the development of a supportive and recovery-focused system.

WHAT HOSPITALS ARE FOR

A fair annual increase in reimbursement for community behavioral health professionals, along with legislation that improves reimbursement for telehealth services so medical professionals can treat more patients.