

## **Public Comment to the Benchmark Legislative Report Final Draft**

Submitted by Emily Vera on behalf of the Mental Health Association in Delaware  
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We would like to thank Secretary Walker for inviting our comments on the report, and for her hard work thus far in reducing healthcare costs and improving quality of healthcare in Delaware. Below are a few brief comments supporting the legislative report.

### **Prevention, Screening and Early Intervention**

There is a great deal of research showing the critical role of social and economic factors in determining an individual's health, including their behavioral health. Therefore it is critical to address these underlying issues if we want to make Delawareans healthier, reduce disparities in healthcare, and reduce cost. We very much appreciate that the report emphasizes addressing these areas.

Adverse childhood events are greatly indicative of a person's future health, with more and prolonged instances of trauma causing greater risk for poor outcomes such as substance use disorders, mental health conditions, and suicide. Investment in early identification and treatment of trauma will pay off in the long run by mitigating the cost of more acute care for those left untreated. Thus, it is critical to invest in prevention, screening and early intervention for behavioral health.

While screening for behavioral health conditions in youth has become more common, there are still barriers, including issues with reimbursement. It is important that screening be a reimbursable service through both public and private insurance, and that practitioners not only know how to be reimbursed, but also know how to link an individual to treatment. Again, identifying behavioral health conditions early will prevent future costs, and more importantly, can vastly improve the quality of life of an individual experiencing such conditions.

### **Equity in Behavioral Healthcare**

Thank you for recommending the formation of the Delaware Health Authority. It is so important to maintain transparency and accountability. Could this also be a vehicle to ensure or encourage equity between behavioral health and other types of healthcare? We should be treating behavioral health care as an equally

important part of healthcare as other specialties, but there is still stigma and resistance which causes inequity.

### **Utilization of Peers in the Workforce**

Thank you for noting the shortage in our workforce. Workforce shortages in behavioral health specifically are significant. One possibility for helping to address these shortages is to increase the employment of peers and to create a pipeline to further education and elevation of peers in the healthcare workforce. If current credentialing can be linked to colleges and universities, leading to a two then a four year degree, and beyond, this could not only bolster the workforce, but also provide meaningful work for talented individuals who may be otherwise be categorized in a way that misses their potential.