



EXISTING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACTIVITIES COMPLEMENT THE MENTAL HEALTH PARITY ACT

April 2022*

2022 has been dubbed the “Year of Mental Health” in Georgia. Given the growing need for mental health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this attention and investment can have great impact in meeting the needs of Georgians, particularly for children’s behavioral health.

The Mental Health Parity Act ([HB 1013](#)) addresses several key areas needed for improved access to behavioral health services in Georgia, including enforcing mental health parity (Part I); developing the behavioral health workforce (Part II); enhancing law enforcement awareness and response to mental health challenges (Part III); and building capacity to identify, prevent, and address behavioral health issues (Parts I-VII).

For more than a decade, the [Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health](#), housed within the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University, has been working in partnership with the [Interagency Directors Team](#) and directly with community state child-serving agencies on efforts to strengthen the system of care. Much of this ongoing work complements focus areas outlined in the Mental Health Parity Act. These existing infrastructure and programmatic initiatives include sharing data and information across agencies, improving care coordination, and curating and sharing best practices and resources.

SHARING DATA ACROSS AGENCIES

Understanding and monitoring spending and movement of money across the child-serving system of care can identify areas for improving efficiencies and ensuring proper resources for priority areas.



Mapping the Money in the Children’s Behavioral Health System

Section 5-3 establishes an October 2024 deadline for an interagency data-sharing arrangement

The Center of Excellence is facilitating the Interagency Directors Team’s Behavioral Health Mapping Workgroup to develop a map of Georgia’s spending on children’s behavioral health based on state fiscal year 2019

*This brief has been updated to reflect the final version of the Mental Health Parity Act, as passed by the Georgia Legislature and signed by the governor on April 4, 2022.

About the Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health

The Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health is housed within the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University, a nationally recognized public health institute, which has been the go-to health policy research center for legislators, state agency leadership, and governors in Georgia since 1995. The center provides credible and relevant information for decision-making. We work collaboratively as a trusted partner by delivering timely, data-driven research and facilitating important, strategic conversations in support of effective policy development and decision-making.

About the Interagency Directors Team

The Interagency Directors Team is a multiagency leadership collaborative that uniquely designs, manages, facilitates, and implements an integrated approach to a child and adolescent system of care. The public-private partnership includes 30 representatives of state agencies and nongovernmental organizations that serve children with behavioral health needs and together jointly inform policy and practice and share resources and funding.



spending by each child-serving agency.¹ Financial data collected reflects services, supports, training, and other infrastructure investments for each agency, as well as corresponding estimates of the number and ages of children served. Spending data have been categorized across the spectrum of need — from prevention to late intervention — and the dollars traced by state and federal source.

Goals of the map: To help agencies, policymakers, and the public understand how Georgia’s system of care is currently supported by each agency and assist in identifying future spending opportunities and opportunities to blend and braid funding.

SUPPORTING PROVIDERS AND DISSEMINATING RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICES

Disseminating research and curating resources can support providers, expand the state’s workforce capacity, and help those in need access information and care.



Identifying Workforce Shortages and Effective Workforce-Boosting Incentives

Section 2-1 establishes loan forgiveness programs for mental health and substance use professionals

The Interagency Directors Team’s Workforce Development Workgroup is completing a national scan of evidence-based workforce recruitment and retention strategies. This scan explores effective best practice strategies to create and promote loan forgiveness programs for behavioral health professionals. Additionally, the workgroup is surveying Georgia’s university clinical training programs to understand trends in enrollment and graduation rates. This will inform workforce-development strategies.

Goal of workforce development: To identify specific shortages in the state and research best practices for recruitment and retention, so the state can build capacity to meet Georgians’ needs.



Helping Individuals and Families Find Services Through a New Website

Section 2-2 establishes a behavioral health care workforce database

The Georgia System of Care State Plan’s website will soon be live and will have a searchable provider database for individuals and families to locate available services in their area.

Goal of a provider database: To develop a user-friendly, publicly accessible database will enable those in need of behavioral health care access services close to home or work.

COORDINATING CARE

Existing cross-agency work, coupled with national learnings, can expand access to behavioral health care for young children in Georgia and more efficiently deliver quality care for youth with complex behavioral health conditions.



Creating a United, State-Level Approach to Early Childhood Access to Care

Sections 4-9 and 6-2 add experts in early childhood mental health to the Behavioral Coordinating Council and Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission, respectively

Several well-established state-level workgroups, including the Department of Early Care and Learning’s Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Taskforce and the Interagency Directors Team’s Prevention and Early Intervention Workgroup, are working together to address prevention and promotion, workforce development, and policy analysis across systems, including Medicaid access to mental health services for children aged 0 to 6 years. These cross-agency and cross-discipline workgroups³ have made progress in understanding the landscape of early childhood systems, and [this research](#) could be leveraged by others.

Goal of interagency early childhood learning: To use a cross-agency, cross-discipline approach to foster joint efforts to support access to mental health services for children from birth through age 6 years.



Researching Innovative Models to Finance Care for Youth With Complex Needs

Section 5-1 creates a MATCH team

The Center of Excellence recently conducted research on how other states are addressing the needs of youth with complex behavioral health conditions through an infrastructure similar to MATCH (Georgia's previous care coordination model). These research findings can inform decision-making in Georgia, including examples of how other states have financed such efforts through pooling existing dollars to provide flexible funds to meet the needs of youth with complex needs.

Goal of researching financing models: To identify promising models from other states that can be customized to meet the needs of youth in Georgia.

The existing work and infrastructure of the Interagency Directors Team can serve as a strong foundation to further the initiatives in the Mental Health Parity Act. The Center of Excellence, which provides backbone and research support for the Interagency Directors Team, remains ready to support the implementation of initiatives outlined in the Mental Health Parity Act and is ready to share learnings from national research and existing work within the state to support a strong system of care for children in Georgia.

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¹ Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Education, Department of Community Health [Medicaid], Division of Family and Children Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Early Care and Learning, Department of Public Health, and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

² Goerge, R. M., Smithgall, C., Seshadri, R., & Ballard, P. (2010). Illinois families and their use of multiple service systems. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

³ Representation includes state agencies, Medicaid managed care organizations, families, private nonprofit service providers, hospitals, clinicians, and professional membership organizations.