



Issue Paper: Healthcare – Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Services*

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. With an estimated 47 million Americans lacking health care coverage, it is also an urgent national priority.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

The State of Washington provides mental health and chemical dependency services through a number of different agencies and entities. Among these are the Health Care Authority (HCA), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), county-administered regional support networks (RSNs), and tribal authorities. Services include involuntary treatment, outpatient, inpatient, acute care, emergency and crisis treatment, day treatment, consultation, and education. Community support services include screening of voluntary referrals to state hospitals, discharge planning with hospitals, crisis response, case management for clients in the community with chronic conditions, and residential programs that supervise, support, and treat adults and children. Limited services are available for any individual with a mental health need in Washington, even if that person is not presently Medicaid eligible. However, funding for all of these programs is very limited, and available resources determine priorities of service. The top priority is given to providing crisis mental health services, and these services are often inadequate due to lack of funding and laws that act as barriers to services.

The Affordable Care Act ensures that all health plans offer a comprehensive package of essential health benefits including mental health and substance abuse services. The State of Washington has consolidated mental health treatment and substance abuse treatment and prevention activities under the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

The Washington State Legislature chose to expand Medicaid coverage to include individuals between the ages of 19 to 65 with incomes up to 133% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The FPL for a single person is \$15,290. In 2014 it was estimated that in Washington State there are 36,427 uninsured adults with mental illness, and 71,803 adults with a substance abuse disorder, who are eligible for care under the Medicaid expansion.

Many people who need treatment services are unable to access them because the services are not available where they live, there is no funding for them, or there are long waiting lists for services. Emergency room visits and jails become the costly alternatives.

2015 Legislative Session Talking Points:

- Increase funding for mental health and chemical dependency services.

* The information contained in this issue paper may change prior to the start of the 2015 Washington State Legislative Session.