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Historic funding for Behavioral Health in Illinois

Governor Pritzker details an increase in support in his February 2nd speech

(Dixon, IL)

A much needed and long overdue increase in funding and support for behavioral health has been proposed in Illinois Governor JB Pritzker's proposed Fiscal Year 2023 Budget and in a bill in the legislature. The Governor revealed some of the details for increased funding of behavioral health in the state in his speech on February 2, 2022.

"This is by far the largest investment in mental health proposed during my time in the field," says Sinnissippi Centers' President/CEO Patrick Phelan. "It is the most advantageous proposed budget we have seen in many years, and we thank the Governor, all of our friends in the legislature, and especially Representative Tom Demmer, who essentially was a co-sponsor of this legislation," adds Phelan. "At last count HB4238 had almost 70 co-sponsors, this is a broadly supported measure," says Phelan. "The new position in the Governor's office will be very beneficial as well."

Part of the motivation for the increase in resources comes from recognizing the effects COVID-19 has had on Illinoisans. The legislation says, "As the pandemic continues into its third year, it continues to take a toll on Illinoisans' mental health and exacerbate the need for additional behavioral health services. From frontline workers and caregivers coping with burnout, to students struggling in school, to adults feeling more isolated as they protect themselves from COVID-19, to those suffering from mental health disorders who have been unable to access the help they need, many Illinoisans could benefit from the assistance behavioral health services provide."

Also, the FY23proposed budget includes key investments to support the State's critical behavioral health partners. The proposed budget includes \$140 million to fund behavioral health provider rate enhancements through Health and Family Services (HFS) and the Department of Human Services (DHS). Additionally, in collaboration with the DHS Divisions of Mental Health and Substance Use Prevention and Recovery, HFS is requesting federal approval of a two-component approach to address shortages in the behavioral health workforce and to further foster quality and innovation in service delivery. HFS is proposing to spend approximately \$20 million in enhanced federal matching dollars for each component, yielding a total of just over \$40 million. Providers enrolled as Community Mental Health Centers, Behavioral Health Clinics, or as providers of substance use disorder services will qualify to receive Workforce Challenge funding. This funding can be used to address staffing stabilization, retention, recruitment, and related purposes important to ensuring access to critically needed behavioral health services for the State's Medicaid customers. Fostering Innovation and Quality payments may be used for the creation and expansion of new services, service delivery mechanisms or enhanced provider capacity and will benefit the same provider types as the Workforce Challenge funding.

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The FY23 budget also includes \$150 million to fully implement the Pathways to Success Program for children with serious mental illnesses. This program helps Medicaid-enrolled children under age 21 who have complex behavioral health needs and require intensive services and support. The program provides intensive care coordination and additional home and community-based services and provides children and their families with the services necessary to support their success at home, school and in their communities.

Governor Pritzker is creating a special position in his office to focus on behavioral health. He said, “Nobody has escaped the isolation, burn out, and trauma of the past two years. Now more than ever, it’s important to invest in behavioral health. That’s why I will be appointing a Chief Behavioral Health Officer to oversee and coordinate behavioral health services directly with the Governor’s Office. Behavioral health is an area where Representative Deb Conroy is a real leader, and with partners across the rotunda like Senators Sara Feigenholtz and Laura Fine, I’m confident the Chief Behavioral Health Officer will succeed in streamlining and coordinating these services across state agencies.”

The proposed FY23 budget includes \$25 million for the creation of a healthcare workforce pipeline program to develop new nurses, certified nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, emergency medical technicians, and other high-demand positions. Governor Pritzker’s proposed PATH Workforce Program, through the state community college system, is a direct response to the shortage of healthcare workers due to the overwhelming impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Governor is directing HFS to reinvest **\$180 million** to preserve and grow the healthcare workforce, with a focus on Medicaid providers and providers in underserved areas of the State, including rural areas. This significant infusion of revenue will provide funding for continuing education trainings for providers and other vital investments in staff retention and recruitment that result in expanded healthcare access. Funding will be available to a broad range of healthcare providers, including hospitals, clinics, **behavioral health providers**, home health workers and more. “Sinnissippi Centers is facing a critical workforce shortage at this time and these additional funds will allow us to recruit and retain qualified staff,” says Phelan.

The Pritzker administration also recommends waiving certain licensing fees at the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation totaling \$21 million, resulting in direct savings to the State’s healthcare workforce in fiscal year 2023.

Illinois Behavioral Healthcare Association’s CEO Marvin Lindsey reacted to the governor’s announcement by saying, “The Community Behavioral Healthcare Association applauds and appreciates Governor Pritzker for including in his proposed FY23 budget the legislative funding initiative proposed by House Majority Leader Greg Harris and State Senator Elgie Sims, which has been championed by the Community Behavioral Healthcare Association and the Rebuild Illinois Behavioral Health Workforce Coalition, that would invest \$140 million to rebuild Illinois behavioral health workforce, which represents a historic financial investment in the care for individuals working to overcome mental health and substance use challenges.”

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