

2024 Issue Paper: Behavioral Health

Position Statement

In the LWVUS publication, “Impact on Issues”, the LWVUS states that “all people should have access to affordable, quality in-patient and out-patient behavioral healthcare, including needed medication and support services.” It goes on to say that “behavioral healthcare should be integrated with, and at parity with, physical healthcare. There should be early and affordable diagnosis and treatment for behavioral health problems for youth from early childhood through adolescence. This should be family focused and community based”. In addition, “persons with behavioral health challenges should have access to safe and stable housing, including those who are chronically homeless”. The League supports “effective re-entry planning and follow-up for people released from behavioral health hospitalization and the criminal justice system, as well as mental health and drug courts that provide needed treatment and avoid inappropriate entry into the criminal justice system.” The LWVUS believes that “health education throughout life should integrate all aspects of social, emotional, and physical health and wellness and they support efforts to reduce stigmatization of behavioral health problems and care.” Finally, as stated in “Impact on Issues”, the League “supports the single-payer concept as a viable and desirable approach to implementing League positions on equitable access, affordability, and financial feasibility.”

Recent History of Behavioral Health Legislation

The Legislature recognized many problems in the area of behavioral health. During the 2023 Legislative Session they passed several behavioral health bills that were signed into law. Among these were bills that:

- Addressed behavioral health workforce shortages, including: Adopting the mental health counselor compact (**HB 1069**), Increasing the trained behavioral health workforce (**HB 1724**), and Establishing behavioral health specialists (**SB 5189**).
- Facilitated communication and interaction between a foster-parent and the parent of the child in foster-care, thus benefiting the child, the parent, and the foster parent. (**HB 1204**)
- Provided increased access to services for children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders and other prenatal substance disorders, as well as increasing prevention efforts (**HB 1168**).
- Enhanced the 988 behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention system based on things learned during its initial implementation (**HB 1134**).
- Closed gaps in privacy protections for healthcare data. This included sensitive behavioral health information (**HB 1155**)
- Extended the time frame in which real-time telemedicine, using audio or audio-video technology may be used (**SB 5036**).
- Established 23-hour crisis relief centers (**SB 5120**).

- Established continuity of coverage for prescription drugs prescribed for the treatment of behavioral health conditions during an insurer's plan year (**SB 5300**)
- Ensuring access to substance use disorder treatment for incarcerated persons (**SB 5502**)

Summary of Issues for the 2024 Legislative Session

The upcoming legislative session will be the second year of the legislative biennium, 2023-2024. Although much was accomplished in 2023, there are still important behavioral health issues to be addressed. These include:

- Increasing the behavioral health workforce.
- Increasing access to behavioral health services in underserved areas and for underserved populations.
- Providing behavioral health services in locations convenient and familiar to persons who might need those services, places such as schools and physicians' offices.
- Ensuring access to behavioral health services at every level across the spectrum of services, from preventative care to inpatient hospitalization.

Support of specific legislation will depend on the bills introduced during the session.

Issue Chair: Mary Lynne Courtney, mcourtney@lwwa.org