Behavioral Health Provider Survey Sheds Light on Stressed Mental Health and Addiction Treatment System in Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

Columbus, OH – The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers (The Ohio Council) recently conducted a membership survey to gain insight into the impact that COVID-19 is having on Ohio’s mental health and addiction treatment providers and system. The Ohio Council finalized the analysis in this report: COVID-19 BH Provider Impact Survey. The report describes the impact of COVID-19 on a range of topics, including service access and capacity, workforce, and business operations.

“The survey results demonstrate the resolve and resiliency of behavioral health providers while highlighting the value of state and federal corona relief funds. However, it should also send a clear warning about the challenges of maintaining a full continuum of care for Ohioans in need of mental health and addiction treatment,” said Teresa Lampl, CEO of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers. “Ohio’s behavioral health providers were already under stress due to the unrelenting opioid epidemic and suicide crisis, having to also deal with the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us to the breaking point,” said Lampl.

The Ohio Council conducted the survey from July 14, 2020 through July 17, 2020 – receiving responses from 74 provider organizations offering a diverse and representative sample of the behavioral health provider experience. Highlights from the survey report include:

- 69% of behavioral health organizations report that most of their services continue to be provided via telehealth. Nearly 60% of organizations report they plan to continue providing as many services through telehealth as possible.

- 95% of organizations reported a decrease in weekly revenue and many organizations (58%) indicate a decrease in weekly revenue of 21% or more.

- Providers have successfully accessed emergency federal coronavirus funds to temporarily sustain service access, workforce, and operations.
  - 78% of organizations responding to this survey received forgivable loans through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). However, 15% of organizations were ineligible to even apply for the PPP due to organizational size.
  - 73% of organizations reported receipt of HHS Provider Relief Funds at the time of the survey. 18% were in the process of applying for the Targeted Medicaid distribution.
38 organizations reported furloughing or laying off 915 FTEs due to the pandemic. However, access to the federal PPP loans have enabled organizations to re-hire 324.25 FTEs or 35% of those furloughed/laid off.

While access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has improved, providers continue to experience challenges in obtaining disinfecting/antibacterial cleaning wipes, disinfecting cleaning sprays and products, and hand sanitizer.

The Ohio Council’s COVID-19 BH Provider Impact Survey documents the swift transition and significant increase in use of telehealth services to sustain access to mental health and addiction treatment during the pandemic. However, the report indicates an overall revenue decrease of more than 20% for most behavioral health provider organizations in this mostly telehealth environment.

“Behavioral health providers have successfully accessed federal loan programs and other one-time resources to offset these losses, sustain workforce, and ensure access to critical behavioral health services. Moving forward, additional longer-term strategies and state and federal investment will be needed to cover the added expenses associated with COVID-19 to sustain the behavioral health infrastructure and respond to the expected surge in demand for mental health and addiction services,” said Lampl.

“Clearly, continued access to telehealth services has been a stabilizing factor as has access to federal resources made available through the CARES Act. And we are very appreciative of the General Assembly’s approval and DeWine Administration’s planning and distribution of state level CARES Act provider relief funding that will support the financial stability of providers and help maintain access to services as we enter into the latter part of the year,” said Lampl.

Based on this survey and discussions with other advocates and policy experts, Congress should act to provide additional resources and supports to address the continuing impact of COVID-19 on behavioral health providers and individuals in need of such services. Specifically, The Ohio Council recommends that Congress should enhance Medicaid’s Federal Medical Assistance Participation (FMAP) rate; authorize additional PPP forgivable loan opportunities, including larger non-profits; direct targeted financial relief funding to community behavioral health providers; and make permanent many of the flexibilities and waivers offered to expand telehealth services.

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The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers is a statewide trade and advocacy organization representing 150 private businesses that deliver prevention, addiction treatment, mental health, and family services throughout Ohio.