

## Legislative Session Wrap-up Edition: Stories in this Newsletter



DHHS Budget



988 Funding

## DHHS Budget Toplines and Our Priorities



- 1) Peer Support and Family organizations. Family organizations, including NDFFCMH, have maintained their funding through the legislative session. ND DHHS has been authorized to turn the 16 temporary peer support specialist positions into regular, full-time positions with benefits. Family peer support is still needing to become a Medicaid-billable service.
- 2) The ND legislature maintained the IMD Exclusion. This was a big win. The IMD Exclusion was established to ensure that states develop community-based mental health services by preventing large institutions (facilities with more than 16 beds) from being able to access Medicaid dollars to reimbursement. If the legislature authorized applying for an IMD Exclusion Waiver, not only could large institutions receive Medicaid reimbursement, but they would also cut off improvements to the mental health system by capping Medicaid spending to current levels. North Dakota is currently in a mental health crisis. North Dakota desperately needs to grow its community services, not cut them off!
- 3) Crisis Services. Crisis Services were expanded with the authorization to hire additional staff. While the expansions were not as large as we would have like to see, this was a positive improvement to our crisis system. That being said, not all regions in North Dakota have fully developed crisis services for adults. Few regions have crisis services for children. These gaps are still in need of being addressed.
- 4) Children's Mental Health. North Dakota has two sites (Bismarck region and Devils Lake region) for its federal System of Care grants through 2026. The System of Care grants are designed to help states substantially increase the capacity of a state or tribal nation to improve their children's mental health services. While North Dakota is building up its capacity in two regions, the rest of the state is in desperate need for improvements, also. From the 2021-2022 fiscal year, North Dakota served 1,101 children with serious emotional disturbance (SED), with only 135 children with SED receiving case management services. There are a lot of opportunities for growth in order to reach the over 18,000 children in North Dakota with SED.
- 5) Cross-Disability Waiver. The legislature authorized the Department of Health and Human Services to pursue a cross-disability waiver for children and create an advisory council with family member representation. The purpose of a cross-disability waiver is to provide a Medicaid waiver for children with disabilities so that they and their families can receive the services and supports that they need. The waiver, as of yet, would not apply to children with mental health disorders. The cross-disability waiver was suggested by the Alvarex and Marsal study as a means to modernize the existing ID/DD Waiver and address the existing shortcomings of the Autism waiver and the demise of the Autism Voucher.
- 6) New State Hospital. The legislature funded a blueprints and plans for the new State Hospital to be "shovel ready" by the start of the next legislative session in January 2025. NDFFCMH was in favor of creating a new State Hospital because the current facilities are old, prohibitively expensive for repairs, not therapeutic, and are in danger of catastrophic systems failures at any point in time. The backup plan is for a handful of days, where in which everyone (including individuals in the sex offender wing) are to be served in the Jamestown Civic Center. This would not be a safe environment.

## 988 Funding



The North Dakota legislature secured funding for the 988 Crisis Lifeline. Federal funding for 988 was going to end, but the mandate to have a 988 crisis line would remain. NDFFCMH, through Mental Health Advocacy Network (MHAN) testified to the legislature about the purpose and mandate of 988 and the importance of adequately funding the crisis lifeline.

The 988 Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The North Dakota 988 Lifeline is operated by FirstLink in Fargo, ND. All phones originating with a (701) area code will be automatically directed to FirstLink, who will be able to navigate persons experiencing crisis to services and interventions as the individual needs them.

Individuals can call, text, or chat 988.

---

North Dakota Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
cmcclarey@ndffcmh.com (Email)  
www.ndffcmh.com  
PO BOX 3061  
Bismarck, ND 58501  
(701) 222-3310

Next Edition: Summer 2023