

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health
and Substance Abuse Services

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GOVERNOR CITES BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES IN ‘STATE OF THE STATE’ ADDRESS

Gov. Mary Fallin demonstrated her continuing support for mental health and addiction services in Oklahoma by proposing a budget increase for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

The Governor’s budget calls for \$6 million to be appropriated to ODMHSAS to meet a federal matching requirement for the State’s Systems of Care program, expand crisis care and develop statewide capabilities to support screening services in jails. Additionally, the majority of the increase, \$136 million, is attributed to a lateral transfer of existing responsibilities related to behavioral health services, and corresponding funding, from the Oklahoma Health Care Authority to ODMHSAS.

ODMHSAS Commissioner Terri White said Governor Fallin has long recognized that untreated behavioral health issues are among the most pressing – and costly – issues facing our state today, both in terms of lives affected and taxpayer dollars spent.

“These illnesses put relationships and jobs in jeopardy, destroy personal finances, and can lead to such tragedies as suicide, accidental death, homelessness and, in many cases, incarceration,” said White.

The Governor’s budget continues to build on last year’s initial investment of \$3 million in the ODMHSAS Smart on Crime proposal. For FY’13, the governor’s budget calls for an additional \$3

million investment in Smart on Crime, focusing \$2.5 million for a community-based crisis center and \$500,000 for jail screenings.

Funding for an additional crisis center will help address the growing issue of law enforcement being required to travel greater distances to transport persons with mental illness who are in need of crisis services. All areas of the state have experienced challenges in meeting the demand for crisis services.

ODMHSAS requested funding for five additional community-based crisis units to be located in the areas of most need. The \$2.5 million to establish one additional crisis center is a great first step toward the additional crisis centers needed to adequately serve Oklahoma, said White.

The addition of jail screenings is a critical piece of information needed by those in the criminal justice system to determine who might be appropriate for diversion programs, White added. The governor's budget document notes that, "Currently, district attorneys, defense attorneys and the judiciary rarely receive objective information regarding the mental health and substance abuse needs and the level of risk of the person standing in front of them. This information would aid prosecutorial and defense decisions as well as help inform sentencing decisions."

Funding will allow ODMHSAS to develop jail screeners through its network of community providers across Oklahoma. Screenings will be done for individuals charged with felonies to inform prosecutorial, defense and sentencing decisions.

In addition to \$3 million in "Smart on Crime" funding, the governor's budget also provides a \$3 million state match necessary to continue the federal "Systems of Care Grant" program for Oklahoma youth with mental health and substance abuse issues.

About 10 percent of Oklahoma youth have a mental health disorder and an additional 10 percent have a substance abuse issue, said White. Without early and effective identification and interventions, childhood disorders can persist and lead to school failure, poor employment opportunities, poverty and criminal justice involvement in adulthood.

Systems of Care is a comprehensive spectrum of mental health and other services that are organized into coordinated networks to meet the multiple and changing needs of children, adolescents and their families with a serious emotional disturbance.

Systems of Care is the backbone of Oklahoma's children's treatment system and the state is the national leader in this evidence-based approach to serving children and youth with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. This investment underscores the importance of serving these youth now to avoid more expensive consequences down the road, the governor noted.

The bulk of the increase is a transfer of an estimated \$136 million state dollars/state match from the OHCA budget to ODMHSAS for behavioral health services. The governor also proposed transferring policy setting and enactment responsibility for behavioral health services from OHCA to ODMHSAS.

The transfer is expected to maximize efficiency of resources, promote comparable outcome expectations from multiple behavioral health provider types and allow dollars to be braided and blended to create the best and most cost effective behavioral health system in the country.

White said she sees the governor's budget request as a positive reflection on both the agency and the importance of increased treatment opportunities for persons facing mental illness and addiction.

"It is absolutely a recognition for the excellent work of the department," said White. "Despite budget struggles, we have managed to implement innovative programs that help link

Oklahomans to needed services; and, in doing so, we have demonstrated the benefits of treatment beyond the individual to include more efficient and effective use of public funds.

“The services outlined in the governor’s budget proposal will help save lives, provide support to communities and those services that have been affected by recent year budget cuts, and save state tax dollars that otherwise would be used to address the negative consequences of untreated mental health and substance abuse issues.”

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