

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

Senate Bill 324

(Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Finance

Health and Government Operations

Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to include mental health first aid among the behavioral health services for which MDH provides service coordination for eligible veterans. Mental health first aid must consist of training for veterans and their immediate family members on how to identify and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. Each entity teaching a mental health first aid course must report to MDH the number of veterans and their family members who took the course. By June 1, 2022, and annually thereafter, MDH must report to the Governor and the General Assembly the total number of veterans and family members who took a mental health first aid course and the total number of courses taught in the State.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill largely codifies current practice. The bill's reporting requirements can be handled with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Subject to the limitations of its budget, MDH must (in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), the Maryland National Guard, and the Maryland Defense Force provide behavioral health service coordination to eligible veterans. Where services are not yet available or accessible at the federal level, MDH must connect eligible veterans to

behavioral health services that may be available through its Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) until federal services can be obtained. For services provided, MDH must seek reimbursement from the VA or other responsible public or private payer and account separately for funds used to provide behavioral health services.

Background: According to MDVA, approximately 371,000 veterans lived in the State in 2019, including approximately 153,000 who were enrolled in the VA Health Care System. Generally, the VA offers treatment and support for a range of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, thoughts of suicide, issues related to military sexual trauma, substance use problems, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. The VA also treats anxiety-related conditions like generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety, and specific phobias.

BHA advises that Maryland's Commitment to Veterans is responsible for providing behavioral health care coordination to veterans and their families. Mental health first aid is currently included among these services. In 2019, 188 individuals were trained as certified trainers and 5,461 were trained to practice mental health first aid at a cost of approximately \$300,000. BHA does not anticipate that the bill will change the way this program operates. However, BHA notes that mental health first aid is a proprietary program. Currently, only one organization provides this training, the Mental Health Association of Maryland. Thus, under the bill, MDH's ability to provide service coordination for this service depends on that program's existence.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Legislative Services

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