



**House Health & Government Operations Committee
February 23, 2022**

**House Bill 517
Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care - Establishment
Support**

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, the number of opioid-related deaths increased by 20% between 2019 and 2020, and preliminary data indicates a continued increase in 2021.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports House Bill 517 to create a new Consumer Health Access Program which will help people find the substance use and mental health treatment they need.

For a number of years, this General Assembly has worked with consumer advocates and treatment providers to ensure people have private and public health insurance that includes coverage of substance use disorder and mental health services. At the same time, the federal government has also recognized the need to provide better assurances that people have access to these essential health care services in both the private market and through Medicaid.

The creation of a Consumer Health Assistance Program (CHAP) will pull together all of these efforts and ensure that people have the assistance connecting to the services that their health insurance already covers. And if a person does not have insurance, assistance through the CHAP can help people learn what they might be eligible for and apply.

Our health care system is complicated. For people dealing with substance use and mental health challenges, or seeking care for a loved one, the barriers that some may see as no more than annoying can be insurmountable to those in crisis. As the CHAP would be staffed by people with lived experience, the services will be tailored and knowledgeable.

Creating this service is an investment that will result in efficiency of public spending and a much greater chance that people will be able to find the services they truly need. The experience in other states where these services have been established has proven their success. We strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 517.