

## Chapter 136

**(House Bill 605)**

AN ACT concerning

**Veterans – Behavioral Health Services – Mental Health First Aid**

FOR the purpose of requiring that the behavioral health services for which the Maryland Department of Health provides service coordination for veterans under certain provisions of law include mental health first aid; requiring that mental health first aid consist of training for veterans and the immediate family members of veterans on how to identify and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders; requiring certain entities to report certain information to the Department; requiring the Department, annually beginning on a certain date and under certain circumstances, to report certain information to the Governor and the General Assembly; making conforming changes; and generally relating to mental health first aid for veterans.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
Article – Health – General  
Section 13–2702  
Annotated Code of Maryland  
(2019 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

BY adding to  
Article – Health – General  
Section 13–2703  
Annotated Code of Maryland  
(2019 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

**Article – Health – General**

13–2702.

(a) Subject to the limitations of its budget, the Department:

(1) In collaboration with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, the Maryland National Guard, and the Maryland Defense Force, shall provide behavioral health service coordination for veterans in all geographic regions of the State to connect them to behavioral health services, **INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID DESCRIBED UNDER § 13–2703(B) OF THIS SUBTITLE**, which may be available through the United States Department of

## Veterans Affairs;

(2) (i) Where behavioral health services are not yet available or accessible through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, shall provide service coordination for veterans in all geographic regions of the State to connect them to behavioral health services, **INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID DESCRIBED UNDER § 13-2703(B) OF THIS SUBTITLE**, which may be available through the Behavioral Health Administration, until such federal services can be accessed and obtained; and

(ii) Shall provide behavioral health services through the Behavioral Health Administration based on eligibility and medical necessity criteria established by these administrations; and

(3) Shall provide veterans up-to-date information about behavioral health services and resources through a web-based resource program.

(b) Subject to the limitations of its budget and in addition to the service coordination provided under subsection (a) of this section, the Department shall provide or fund certain behavioral health services for veterans who:

(1) Meet the eligibility and medical necessity criteria of the Behavioral Health Administration; and

(2) Cannot obtain immediate access to behavioral health services through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

(c) (1) The behavioral health services provided under subsection (b) of this section may include:

(i) Crisis services in all geographic regions of the State; and

(ii) Short-term behavioral health services, where existing federal and State behavioral health services are determined by the Department to be inadequate or inaccessible.

(2) The short-term behavioral health services provided under paragraph (1)(ii) of this subsection:

(i) Shall be available only until a veteran is able to access and obtain adequate behavioral health services through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; and

(ii) May include:

1. Screening assessments;

2. Individual, family, and group therapy;
3. Substance abuse early intervention and detoxification services; and
4. Substance abuse medication–assisted treatment.

(3) The Department shall seek reimbursement from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or other responsible public or private payer for any behavioral health services provided under subsection (b) of this section.

(d) The Department shall account separately for funds used to provide behavioral health services to veterans under subsection (b) of this section.

### **13–2703.**

**(A) THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR WHICH THE DEPARTMENT PROVIDES SERVICE COORDINATION FOR VETERANS UNDER THIS SUBTITLE SHALL INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID.**

**(B) MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID SHALL CONSIST OF TRAINING FOR VETERANS AND THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS ON HOW TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO SIGNS OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS.**

**(C) EACH ENTITY TEACHING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE SHALL REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT:**

**(1) THE NUMBER OF VETERANS WHO TOOK THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE; AND**

**(2) THE NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS WHO TOOK THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE.**

**(D) ON OR BEFORE JUNE 1 EACH YEAR, BEGINNING IN 2023, IF THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED A REPORT UNDER SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION IN THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING YEAR, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2–1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING YEAR:**

**(1) THE TOTAL NUMBER OF VETERANS IN THE STATE WHO TOOK A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE;**

**(2) THE TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS IN THE STATE WHO TOOK A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE; AND**

**(3) THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSES TAUGHT IN THE STATE, REPORTED BY THE ENTITY THAT TAUGHT THE MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID COURSE.**

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2021.

**Approved by the Governor, May 18, 2021.**