

House Bill 1082 Public Health - Consumer Health Information - Hub and Requirements

Health and Government Operations Committee

March 9, 2022

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates, and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness, and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 1082.

HB 1082 would name the University of Maryland Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy as the State's Consumer Health Information Hub; would require State and local agencies to use plain language in public communications about health, safety, and social services benefits; and would establish grant and procurement requirements related to health literacy.

Health literacy supports patients in being able to find, understand, and use health information and services. Literacy issues can arise when a patient isn't familiar with medical terms, is forced to interpret statistics and evaluate risks or benefits to care or is diagnosed with a serious illness and feeling scared or confused. It plays an important role in supporting patients receiving behavioral health care, including helping them better understand how to obtain and maintain positive mental health, understand a mental health diagnoses and any recommended treatments, and in decreasing stigma related to mental health issues. Mental health literacy may also enhance help-seeking efficacy, or the knowledge of when and where to seek help, and in developing competencies designed to improve one's mental health care and self-management capabilities.¹

The CDC suggests that these problems can be mitigated by creating and providing information and services which people can understand, and by working with educators and others to help people become more familiar with health information and services to build their health literacy skills over time.² The Horowitz Center for Health Literacy provides research, education, and services to improve health literacy at the individual, family, community, organization, and society levels, and this bill would allow the Center for further provide state and local government agencies, health systems, nonprofit and community-based organizations and other entities with expertise and resources related to all aspects of health literacy.

¹ Kutcher S, Wei Y, Coniglio C. (2016). *Mental Health Literacy: Past, Present, and Future*. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 2016;61(3):154-158. doi:10.1177/0706743715616609

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Health Literacy*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/Understanding.html>

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HB 1082 would help improve the ability of our health care professionals and government agencies to communicate effectively with the public, patients, and caregivers, promote effective communication to improve health outcomes and lower costs for individuals, communities and the health care system, and support the goal of health equity, while lowering costs. For these reasons, MHAMD urges a favorable report on HB 1082.