

**House Bill 813 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Prescription Digital Therapeutics**

Health and Government Operations Committee

March 2, 2023

**TESTIMONY IN 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 and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 813.

HB 813 requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide coverage for prescription digital therapeutics.

Demand for mental health care is at an all-time high. A 2021 report from the Maryland Behavioral Health Administration identified a 35% increase in total suicide attempt emergency department visits from 2020-2021 across all age groups, including a 46% increase in children and a 40% increase in Marylanders over 65.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the state is working to address a persistent and longstanding behavioral health workforce shortage. Federal data<sup>2</sup> released just this month found that Maryland has 63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs)<sup>3</sup>, including 11 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.7 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that 17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower.<sup>4</sup>

Digital mental health treatments (DMHTs) can help. They provide an effective and scalable method for extending the reach of quality mental health care. DMHTs support patients and clinicians in managing mental health through the use of smartphone and Web applications, with growing research investigating therapeutic video games, virtual reality, and conversation agents.<sup>5</sup> Research has shown that DMHTs are effective for treating PTSD and depression/anxiety with mild, moderate, or severe symptoms; DMHT treatment efficiency for common mental health conditions is comparable to standard face-to-face therapies; and they

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<sup>1</sup> Behavioral Health Administration Update to the Maryland Behavioral Health Advisory Council, November 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

<sup>3</sup> A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>

<sup>5</sup> Psychiatric Services doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.202000561. <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.202000561>

are shown to be effective across the lifespan, with a growing number of studies indicating effectiveness among children and adolescents, as well as older adults.<sup>6</sup>

A recent forum of national and international experts representing health care organizations, insurance companies and payers, employers, patients, researchers, policy makers, health economists, and more called for expanded access to and reimbursement for DMHTs, and a broad integration of these therapies into the U.S. health care landscape.<sup>7</sup>

An increasing demand for mental health care amidst a persistent behavioral health workforce shortage calls for new and innovative solutions. **For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 813 and urges a favorable report.**

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<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.