

Senate Bill 124
Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits - Coverage and Reimbursement
Finance Committee
February 12, 2024
Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 124, which requires health insurers, nonprofit health service plans, health maintenance organizations, and Medicaid managed care organizations to provide coverage for annual behavioral health wellness visits, regardless of whether an assessment leads to a behavioral health diagnosis.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

According to the 2023 State of Mental Health in America report, 18% of adults in Maryland, equivalent to over 822,000 individuals, experienced a mental illness, while 15% of youth aged 12-17 reported suffering from at least one major depressive episode (MDE) in the past year.¹ As the second largest human service provider in Maryland, we witness firsthand the growing need for behavioral health wellness visits. Specifically, at Villa Maria Behavioral Health, we offer mental health and substance use disorder treatment to individuals and families through our eight clinics and in-home respite services, in addition to maintaining over 100 public school partnerships. Our services extend to adults, children, and families across Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Frederick, Harford, Allegany, and Garrett Counties, catering to clients covered by Medicaid, including the Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP), and Medicare.

This bill is crucial as it mandates Medicaid to establish a new single billing rate for unified reimbursement of Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) services, ensuring fair access to mental health assessments and services without discrimination based on diagnosis. SBIRT is a comprehensive, integrated, public health approach to delivering early intervention and treatment services for individuals with substance use disorders, as well as those at risk of developing these disorders, thereby ensuring comprehensive care for individuals.

Maryland's citizens, communities, and employers all stand to benefit from this legislation, as every Marylander having access to an annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visit to assess their mental health and receive appropriate treatment referrals would be invaluable. Implementing this measure would represent a significant step forward, as early intervention through annual Behavioral Wellness Visits significantly reduces the likelihood of work, family, and school-related issues, as well as the onset of more severe mental health and substance use problems, ultimately resulting in reduced overall medical care costs. **For these reasons, Catholic Charities urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 124.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

1. Mental Health America. Prevalence Data 2023. Mental Health America. Published 2023. Accessed February 12, 2024. <https://mhanational.org/issues/2023/mental-health-america-prevalence-data>