

## Introduction

In 2021, the Behavioral Health Action Team of the Healthy St. Mary's Partnership explored behavioral health resources available to the youth (under 18) and geriatric (over 65) populations in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The team looked at existing data related to population-level behavioral health and developed an asset map of these resources to gather baseline data and serve as a foundation for recommendations for future services within the community.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has designated all of St. Mary's County a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for mental health. The ratio of population to mental health providers is 870:1. In the most recent St. Mary's County Community Health Assessment (2020), one focus group participant noted a lack of services for the entire community, stating:

*"The lack of behavioral health services is a concern. The county, traditionally, has not been able to attract mental health professionals/psychiatrists. Behavioral services for the homeless and children need to be built upon."*

In St. Mary's County, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital (MSMH) is the only full-service hospital and offers emergency, inpatient, and outpatient mental health services. MSMH, however, does not have adolescent mental health services. In 2019, the rate of emergency department visits related to mental health conditions for adolescents under the age of 18 (per 100,000 population) was 2,156.5 (CRISP, 2019). For adults 65 and older, the rate of emergency department visits in 2019 (per 100,000 population) was 25,611.2 (CRISP, 2019). The rate of emergency department visits for addictions related conditions (per 100,000 population) across all ages in 2017 was 1,471.3 (HSCRC Research Level Statewide Outpatient Data Files, MD SHIP, 2017).

Additional input from focus group participants in the 2020 St. Mary's County Community Health Assessment identified the need for more behavioral health services for the geriatric population in the county. One focus group participant noted that "...access to health and transportation for the elderly population isn't the best." Another participant stated:

*"We need to look out for the mental health of our elderly community. There's a whole genre of people who are being missed."*

When the Behavioral Health Action Team analyzed the asset map developed in 2021, the team noted a lack of psychiatry services for the youth and geriatric populations in St. Mary's County. One team member noted *"...there is a limited availability of psychiatric facilities to refer patients to. Of the approximately 20 facilities in Maryland and D.C., about one third of facilities will accept children 13 and younger and another one third will accept teens."* The team noted that due to the limited number of providers, the wait times for appointments is an issue. Several team members stated that they had clients who waited several months for an appointment and that they had clients feeling defeated after calling several providers and being turned away.

For the geriatric population, the team noted that there are limitations to services for those with Medicare and no supplemental health plan. A majority of providers in St. Mary's County do not have the credentialing to accept Medicare.

## Summary of Recommendations

- **Promote resources to help community members seeking services.** The Behavioral Health Action Team recommends providing more information in the community about services that can aid community members as they search for a behavioral health provider. Increased media campaigns to push out resources and targeting information sharing with local senior housing communities are two identified methods for increasing information sharing. For the adolescent population, the social workers and counselors within the St. Mary's County Public Schools system and school counselors at private schools can be a resource to help connect to services. For the geriatric population, the St. Mary's County Department of Aging and Human Services can aid in this connection. The Behavioral Health Division at the St. Mary's County Health Department is available for all community members to provide information about local providers. Additionally the following online and phone-based service locators have been identified to help community members when they are in need of behavioral health services:
  - MD 211
  - SAMSHA Services Locator
  - Findhelp.org
  - Mental Health America Finding Help
- **Provide information for virtual services.** In a crisis situation, community members should be encouraged to utilize services such as 911, the Suicide Prevention Hotline,

and the crisis text line (741741). In a non-crisis situation, the team recommends utilizing virtual behavioral health services to supplement the services that are located within St. Mary's County. Many providers outside of the county currently offer telehealth services; additionally there are several trusted options for app-based services which offer access to providers that are not physically located within St. Mary's County.

- **Advocate for providers to get medicare credentialing.** Currently licensed clinical professionals are unable to panel and provide direct care nationally under Medicare. The Behavioral Health Action Team encourages providers that are currently able to under federal law, to make becoming a credentialed Medicare provider a priority.