TAADAS supports the TDMHSAS budget proposal submitted to Governor Lee

TAADAS greatly appreciates the ongoing support from Governor Lee and the TN Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) for our members who are largely state contracted treatment providers. Over the last two years, TDMHSAS has worked to increase provider rates to address the costs of inflation over the previous 10 years. These increases have allowed providers to raise staff salaries so that providers can be more competitive in hiring and retention. The rate increase has already had a substantial impact toward supporting quality of care, providing a higher trained staff that is needed to provide care for the increasing rate of co-morbid mental health and substance use disorders and the impact of COVID. The Governor’s budget proposal supports Commissioner Williams’ call for a recurring inflationary provider rate increase for Substance Abuse providers of $1,918,300.

In her budget presentation, Commissioner Williams also recognized the importance of continuing to support the provision of residential rehabilitation services for substance use. Governor Lee supported this request by blending funding from TDMHSAS and the TennCare Shared Savings Pool to support residential and recovery support programs. This funding will provide residential treatment and recovery support for Tennessean’s who are uninsured or underinsured and are not eligible for TennCare. Currently there are 20,154 Tennesseans served each year with this funding and TDMHSAS estimates there are another 52,180 people who need services annually.

Recovery is a long-term commitment for people starting treatment and for many this requires long-term support. TDMHSAS offers an Addiction Recovery Program (ARP) that provides community-based wrap around support to help people sustain their recovery during and after treatment. ARP services include transitional housing, relapse prevention skills, transportation, and pastoral/spiritual support. The ARP office has had a waiting list of providers willing to provide these services but without increased funding, the program could not be expanded.

Additionally, the Tennessee General Assembly funded a behavioral health scholarship program through TDMHSAS during the special session in the Fall of 2023. That scholarship program will fund the education for master’s degree students in behavioral health in Tennessee universities. The scholarship program will provide a great deal of support to recruit and retain staff for state-funded treatment providers. TAADAS and TAMHO will begin distributing scholarships in the Spring of 2024.

In addition to these budget priorities, TAADAS members have elected to support de-criminalization and distribution of Xylazine test strips to encourage the ability to test drugs. Distribution of drug testing strips to test for Fentanyl has proven to be successful. Both Fentanyl and Xylazine are being surreptitiously introduced into manufactured pills and other substances and this has greatly impacted the rate of overdose and overdose deaths.

TAADAS will also continue to work on parity regulation and enforcement at the national and state levels. Newly proposed rules for enforcement by the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) have been encouraging and once implemented, Tennessee will need to review mechanisms for enactment and enforcement. Access to a sufficiently meaningful behavioral health provider network continues to be a parity issue for many states, and this has been cited as an issue in Tennessee.