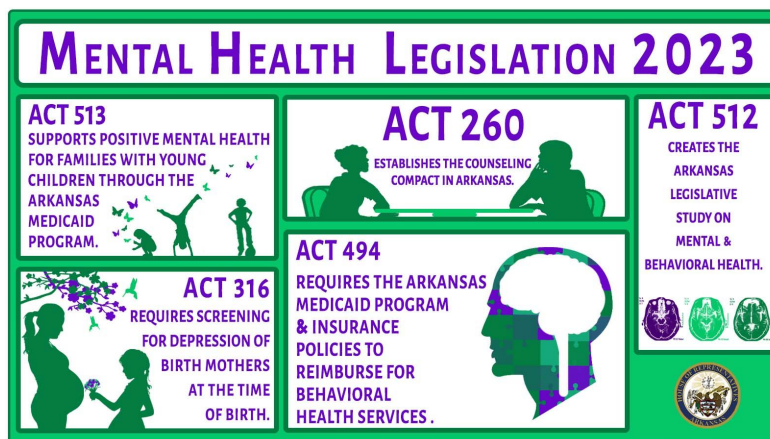




Arkansas House Newsletter

April 27, 2023

Mental Health Legislation 2023



In the months leading up to the 2023 Regular Session, several legislators were meeting with mental health providers, medical professionals, and behavioral health stakeholders to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mental and behavioral health care currently available in the state.

This study resulted in several recommendations and as a result, the 94th General Assembly passed several bills intended to improve access and quality of mental health care.

Testimony in the working group meetings revealed that more than 36,000 adolescents in Arkansas had a major depressive episode in the last year and that pediatricians across the state were spending the majority of their day working on behavioral health issues. One of the recommendations from the group was to incentivize medical homes, through supplemental reimbursement rates, to address prevention and early intervention through universal, team-based enhanced primary care services for children.

That recommendation led to the passage of [Act 513](#). This act directs the Arkansas Medicaid Program to provide a supplemental reimbursement rate for physician practices enrolled in the patient-centered medical

home program that participate in a team-based, evidence-based pediatric practice transformation model of care.

In an effort to increase the number of mental health counselors, the legislature passed [Act 260](#) creating the Counseling Compact in Arkansas. It allows licensed professional counselors in Arkansas to treat clients in person or via telehealth in other compact member states. Currently, 17 states are members.

Other pieces of legislation passed addressing mental health include the following:

[Act 494](#) requires the Arkansas Medicaid Program and insurance policies to reimburse for behavioral health services.

[Act 316](#) requires screening for depression in birth mothers at the time of birth and mandates that insurance policies cover the screening.

[Act 30](#) allows an individual who voluntarily seeks mental health treatment in a mental health institution or facility to petition the court for a license to carry a concealed handgun two years after treatment.

[Act 61](#) creates a specialty court program for families involved in a dependency-neglect proceeding affected by substance abuse or mental health disorders.

The General Assembly also passed [Act 512](#) which creates the Arkansas Legislative Study on Mental and Behavioral Health so we can continue to review the needs of our state and make recommendations for future legislative sessions.

[We'd like to remind Arkansans that if you or someone you know is in emotional distress or suicidal crisis call 988. When people call, text, or chat 988, they will be connected to trained counselors that are part of the existing lifeline network.](#)