



Arkansas House Newsletter

February 16, 2024

ALC Approves Funding for Enhanced Behavioral Health Services



In a recent report to Arkansas lawmakers, it was revealed that behavioral health cases at a pediatric hospital surged by 25% since the pandemic's onset, with pediatricians noting that a significant portion of their workload now revolves around such cases. This trend mirrors national statistics cited by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), indicating that mental illness affects 1 in 5 Americans annually, including 1 in 5 children at some point in their lives. Responding to this pressing issue, the Arkansas Legislative Council recently approved funding a comprehensive plan aimed at tackling the crisis.

The council allocated \$30 million from the American Rescue Plan funds, as per the Department of Human Services' request, to enhance mental health and substance abuse services statewide. This initiative encompasses various strategies, including establishing a coordinated crisis response system featuring a 24-hour call center linking individuals in crisis with clinicians via tablets, deploying mobile crisis teams, and providing telehealth training for first responders. Additionally, the plan focuses on bridging gaps in support by

bolstering connections between healthcare and emergency response entities through innovative software.

Arkansas's Department of Human Services Secretary outlined plans to allocate these funds strategically, aiming to preempt crisis escalation and fill existing gaps in care services.

In 2021, the Arkansas General Assembly mandated a study on Mental and Behavioral Health in the state. Following extensive consultations involving DHS representatives, legislators, healthcare professionals, and stakeholders, the proposed plan addresses key concerns identified in the study.

Moving forward, ongoing efforts to enhance mental health services in the state remain a priority, with optimism surrounding the anticipated impact of the approved plan.