



For Immediate Release

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New Poll Finds Two out of Three Likely Michigan Voters and More Than 100 Michigan-Based Groups Prefer Public-led Mental Health System

LANSING, Mich. (February 21, 2022) – A new poll commissioned by the [Community Mental Health Association of Michigan](#) and conducted by third-party survey provider [EPIC-MRA](#) found 67% of Michigan voters prefer the public mental health system to be managed by public entities who specialize in mental health care vs. turning the system over to private, for-profit companies.

Last year, Michigan Senate Majority Leader Shirkey introduced Senate Bills 597 & 598 which would privatize all Medicaid mental health services by giving full financial control and oversight to for-profit insurance companies. **The EPIC-MRA polling shows two out of three Michigan voters would NOT support that change.**

The poll was conducted in January 2022 among active and likely November 2022 general election voters across Michigan with a margin error of +/-4%. It comes at a critical time as communities across Michigan and the U.S. face a growing need for mental health support in the wake of the coronavirus. Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer also prioritized mental health funding in her State of the State address this past January, proposing \$361 million to open school-based clinics and fund mental health professionals inside schools and increase access to mental health screenings. Other key data points from the poll include:

- Nearly 3 times as many Michiganders oppose the privatization of the state's mental health services for Medicaid patients (the purpose of Senate Bills 587 & 598). 67% oppose while only 24% support that privatization.
- 76% of voters are concerned that private, for-profit health plans, do not have a good track record in treating patients with mental health needs and fear they will make matters worse.
- 73% of voters are concerned that high overhead costs of the private health insurance companies (double that of the public system) and the corporate profits that these companies take out of the taxpayer-funded Medicaid system will lead to less mental health services for those in need.
- The data also found factors that make a public mental health care system more cost effective than a private system, including active management of comprehensive services, a person-centered planning approach and high medical loss ratios (low spending on administrative costs to allocate those dollars towards Medicaid beneficiaries).
- Nearly 4 times as many Michiganders are less likely to support their legislator if he/she supports privatization of mental health services for Medicaid patients than those more likely to support that legislator: 40% less likely compared with only 11% more likely.
- Twice as many Michiganders think that Governor Whitmer should veto legislation if it passes than those who think she should sign the bills: 54% favor veto with only 27% favoring signing

"Our members have heard of concerns first-hand from their constituents and these results just confirm voters worry about letting private health plans take control of the services for our most vulnerable populations," said Stephan Currie, the Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Counties. "It is clear that Michiganders and County Commissioners from across the state believe that keeping a local public mental health system is best."

For the past 50 years, the mental health system in Michigan has been run and operated by county-based government entities to serve Michiganders with complex mental health, emotional disturbance, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders. The [study by the Center for Healthcare Innovation and](#)

[Integration](#) found that Michigan’s public mental health system has a long tradition of high performance. Each year more than 325,000 Michiganders receive their services and care from the Michigan public mental health care system. The legislation under consideration in the Michigan State Senate would eliminate the existing Michigan public mental health care system and shift \$3.5 billion of these state and federal dollars spent annually on this to private for-profit insurance companies based in Missouri, California, Minnesota, Arizona and Indiana.

“When Michigan ultimately develops a better system of behavioral health care, it must be designed around the needs of the individuals and families being served,” said Sherri Boyd, Executive Director of The Arc—Michigan. “While today’s system needs work, the proposed legislation being discussed here reflects the needs of payers first, not people, which is the primary reason it is not being better received by the public. We believe better solutions are out there and look forward to working with our state’s policy leaders to help identify and implement them.”

In a separate report, The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) gave health insurance companies that provide mental health services for treatment of mild-to-moderate mental health cases 2.4 out of 5 stars. Supporters of the public mental health care system are concerned that health insurance companies will not be able to provide services for adults with severe mental health needs, according to this new poll. Additionally, other states (such as Iowa) who have selected private companies to manage mental health care have found they do not provide the same level of care or understand the unique needs.

“As survey findings underscore, Michiganders strongly oppose Senate Bills 597 & 598. Their concerns revolve around the weak track record that the private health insurance companies have with mental health services and the high overhead costs and profit taking of these companies – syphoning tax dollars out of the system designed to serve some of the most vulnerable Michiganders,” said Robert Sheehan, CEO of CMHA. “Michiganders see through the false portrayal of these bills as improving the lives of the Michiganders. They see the damage that these bills will do to the state’s public Community Mental Health system and, as a result, to the health and quality of life of the 325,000 Michiganders who have long relied on this system for high quality mental health services and supports.”

More than [100 Michigan-based groups](#) oppose the privatization of mental health care, including the Michigan Sheriff’s Association, the Michigan Association of Counties, over 30 boards of county commissioners, over 50 mental health provider organizations, judicial and school-based organizations, the Michigan Catholic Conference, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and organized labor groups.

For more information and to sign the petition against the privatization of Michigan’s mental health system, please visit CMHAM.org/advocacy. You can also go to this site to sign up for advocacy notices that will link you to your State Legislators.

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