



## Mental Health Policy Achievements from the 84th Legislative Session

Thanks to support from individuals and companies, Mental Health America of Texas continues to make a difference at the state level. Our policy and advocacy staff work year round to effect legislation that benefits all Texans with a mental health disorder. During the 84th legislative session, Mental Health America of Texas worked closely with other advocates and legislators to increase funding for mental health and substance use disorders by \$150.7 million. The new funding is in addition to the continued funding for the \$300 million new dollars the legislature appropriated for the 2014-2015 biennium.

MHA Texas' legislative wins included two important bills for all Texans who have received treatment for a mental health disorder. Representative Garnet Coleman's [House Bill 2216](#) and [HB 2708](#) remove stigmatizing questions about mental illness from the driver's license application and learner's permit application. MHA Texas also worked with Senator Donna Campbell on [Senate Bill 674](#) and Representative Byron Cook on [HB 2186](#) to improve suicide prevention training for school personnel. Another important win was Senator José Rodríguez's [SB 1624](#) requiring that information on mental health and suicide prevention is given to incoming full-time students at Texas colleges and universities.

As leader of the [Texas Coalition for Healthy Minds](#), Mental Health America of Texas brings together more than 25 state level mental health and health organizations in support of mental health and substance use disorder improvements both at the legislature and throughout the Interim. One major success that the Texas Coalition for Healthy Minds pushed for was Senator Charles Schwertner's [SB 239](#) that creates a loan forgiveness repayment program for mental health professionals, an important tool in addressing the mental healthcare workforce shortage. The Coalition has become the leading voice on mental health at the Capitol and legislators regularly call upon MHA TEXAS and members of the Coalition for input on a variety of mental health-related legislation.

## Achievements from the 84th Legislative Session cont...

In addition, MHA Texas, with the focused efforts of the new Public Policy Fellow, funded by a grant from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, expanded its capacity this session and developed new strategic partnerships. MHA Texas led a group of mental health and criminal justice advocates who worked together on issues including Crisis Intervention Training for correctional officers, a new forensic director at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), expansion of diagnostic eligibility for Texas Commission on Offenders with Medical and Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) services, suspension and reinstatement of Medicaid for individuals in county jails, and reducing solitary confinement for individuals in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) who have mental health disorders.

Through our increased capacity, Mental Health America of Texas led a group of substance use advocates that met regularly throughout the session and collaborated on a number of important issues. Notably, Senator West's [Senate Bill 1462](#) was a huge win for the recovery community. This bill expands access to Naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal medication that will save hundreds of lives in Texas.

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