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Hurdles Leave Many Marylanders without Access to Needed Psychiatric Services

New report finds that inaccurate listings and long wait times prevent many Marylanders from getting psychiatric care.

BALTIMORE – Marylanders seeking psychiatric services can face significant hurdles, delaying or preventing them from getting the care they need, a new report from The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) concludes.

The report, [Access to Psychiatrists in 2014 Qualified Health Plans](#), written by [The Maryland Parity Project](#), details the difficulties Marylanders encounter when they attempt to contact psychiatrists or make an appointment. MHAMD performed this study to assess the accuracy and adequacy of the psychiatric networks of commercial insurers. The 2014 Qualified Health Plans (QHP) sold through the Maryland Health Connection were chosen for analysis because they are the only network listings that are public. Researchers spent six months attempting to contact psychiatrists to determine their availability and whether they were taking new patients.

Researchers found that only 43 percent of listed psychiatrists were reachable, with many out of date phone numbers or addresses. More than 10 percent of providers who could be reached indicated that they were not even psychiatrists. Many of the doctors contacted had extremely long wait times. Only one in seven psychiatrists were accepting new patients and available for an appointment within 45 days.

“Picking up the phone to get help is hard enough,” said Adrienne Ellis, Director Maryland Parity Project, MHAMD. “We must ensure that Marylanders who take that first step in seeking care don’t get discouraged before they get the help they need. As the number of newly insured Marylanders continues to grow, wait times will increase and individuals may forgo care or be forced to pay high out of pocket costs to access critical care outside their insurance network.” The report shows that consumers may spend hours on the phone trying to find a provider who is taking appointments and accepts their insurance.

“Between recent cuts to reimbursement rates for behavioral health providers in the public system and the inability to secure a timely psychiatric appointment in the commercial market, doors seem to be closing for Marylanders asking for help,” said Linda Raines, CEO, MHAMD. “Prior studies dating back to 1988 have documented similar access problems for commercially insured individuals in need of care. The situation can no longer be ignored.”

The report’s findings detail the struggles Marylanders face when seeking psychiatric care, including:

- Only 14 percent of the 1,154 psychiatrists listed in the QHP networks were accepting new patients and available for an appointment within 45 days.

- 57 percent of the 1,154 psychiatrists were unreachable - many because of nonworking numbers or because the doctor no longer practiced at the listed location.
- If consumers could not get a timely appointment with an in-network doctor, they would be subjected to high out-of-pocket costs to see an out-of-network psychiatrist.

The full report can be downloaded at <http://mhamd.org/what-we-do/services-oversight/maryland-parity-project/>

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About The Maryland Parity Project

The Maryland Parity Project is an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland that works to educate insured Marylanders of their rights in accessing mental health and substance use disorder treatment under the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008.