

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGING AND LONG-TERM CARE

Adrin Nazarian, Chair

AB 480 (Salas) – As Introduced February 12, 2019

SUBJECT: Mental health: older adults.

SUMMARY: Relates to mental health. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes within the State Department of Health Care Services an Older Adult Mental Health Services Administrator to oversee mental health services for older adults.
- 2) Requires that position to be funded with administrative funds reserved to the department from the Mental Health Services Fund.
- 3) States Legislative intent to increase service integration for older adults receiving mental health services funded by the Mental Health Services Fund.
- 4) States legislative intent to establish and prioritize standardized geriatrics training for mental health professionals to account for the increasingly diverse population and to address barriers and stigma experienced by older adult populations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Under existing law, the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), an initiative measure enacted by the voters as Proposition 63 at the November 2, 2004, statewide general election, establishes the continuously appropriated Mental Health Services Fund to fund various county mental health programs, including the Adult and Older Adult Mental Health System of Care Act.
- 2) Authorizes the MHSA to be amended by a 2/3 vote of the Legislature if the amendments are consistent with, and further the purposes of, the MHSA, and also permits the Legislature to clarify procedures and terms of the MHSA by a majority vote.

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has not yet been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: "Given the rapidly growing segment of the state's population that is made up of older adults, and the significant and unique challenges that older adults face as it relates to mental health, it is critical that the state appoint a leader and adopt a plan to increase, improve and integrate mental health services for older adults."

BACKGROUND

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is estimated that 20 percent of people age 55 years or older experience some type mental health concern.

Mental health issues that older adults face – which range from anxiety and depression to serious mental illness – can be complicated by other ailments and chronic diseases that are more

common among older adults, such as dementia, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, or cancer. Moreover, older adults diagnosed with a mental illness are more likely to develop chronic conditions and dementia as they age.

Far too often older adults do not seek or receive the help they need, despite that fact that one in five older adults experience mental health concerns. By the age of 75, close to half of all Americans will have experienced a diagnosable mental disorder. The World Health Organization estimates that worldwide, 15 percent of adults age 60 and over live with mental illness.

Mental health issues are often implicated as a factor in cases of suicide and older adults also have the highest suicide rate in the country. The percentage increase in suicides from 1996 to 2016 in California has risen dramatically, notably among older adults. From 1991 to 2017, California saw a 58 percent increase in the number of suicides for those aged 65-84 and 50 percent for those 85 and older (compared with a 14.8 average increase statewide across all age groups). Suicide rates are particularly high in rural parts of California where access to mental health care is severely lacking.

According to a study conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, less than one-third of all older adults in the United States who need mental health care receive it. The study found a number of deficiencies in the current structure as it relates to mental health services for older adults. It found that: a) implementation of older adult mental health services is uneven; b) MHSA outcome reporting is inadequate for measuring the reach and effectiveness of services among older adults; c) there are significant and persistent deficits in the geriatrics workforce; and, d) there are numerous barriers to mental health services for older adults.

Under existing law, the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), an initiative measure approved by voters as Proposition 63 in 2004, establishes the continuously appropriated Mental Health Services Fund to fund various mental health programs, including the Adult and Older Mental Health System of Care Act.

Since the passage of Prop. 63 until 2014, over \$13 billion in the state's tax revenue has been allocated for public mental health services, yet a distinct administrative structure and specific funding older adult services are not mandated in MHSA, as they are for children under the age of 18.

Previously, there was a position within the California Department of Aging – the Geriatric Mental Health Specialist – that was funded by MHSA funds who was responsible for overseeing mental health services for older adults. However, this position no longer exists with the California Department of Aging.

Suggested Amendment:

Would establish within the State Department of Aging an Older Adult Mental Health Services Administrator to oversee mental health services for older adults.

Why: There are several bills this year that focus on a master plan for aging. The Governor also mentioned a master plan on aging in his state of the state address to the legislature. One of the issues that is being discussed as part of a master plan on aging is better coordinated services and a no wrong door approach. Given the current fragmentation of the system, the department of

aging would be the more appropriate place to coordinate mental health services for seniors where it was previously housed.

Argument in Support: The California Hospital Association writes, “This new position would better integrate physical and mental health care for older adults, leading to higher-quality care for California’s elderly. In addition, the position would ensure that funds from the Mental Health Services Act are used efficiently and as the bill intended.”

Argument in Opposition: None.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association for Health Services at Home (CAHSAH)
California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies
California Hospital Association
LeadingAge California

Opposition

None on file.

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