2025 Legislative Priorities

The 2025 Legislative Priorities for the Washington County Coalition for Children advance youth mental wellness through advocacy, collaboration, and policy support. By strengthening crisis response, expanding access to care, and securing sustainable funding, the Coalition ensures children and families receive the mental health support they need to thrive.

988 Funding – H6128/S892

What It Does: Assures Rhode Island's 988 behavioral health crisis system has a sustainable funding stream to provide residents with the help they need, including: *Someone to Call* (Hotline), *Someone to Respond* (Mobile Crisis Teams), and *Somewhere to Go* (Stabilization Services). This bill directs monies the state already collects to support RI's first responder needs, including 911, also be allocated to support 988.

Why It Matters: When someone is in a mental health crisis, they deserve a rapid, compassionate response. This bill ensures 988 is sustainable and remains a trusted, life-saving resource—connecting people to care. It's an investment in a stronger mental health system for all Rhode Islanders.

MRSS Insurance Coverage – H6118/S263

What It Does: Makes sure commercial insurancers, not just Medicaid, cover *Mobile Response and Stabilization Services* (MRSS) for youth. MRSS offer fast, community-based intervention services for kids (ages 2-21) facing a mental health crisis. Families can access services upon request 24/7/365.

Why It Matters: When a child is struggling, families need help right away—not long waits or trips to the Emergency Dept. MRSS sends trained professionals to support kids where they are, keeping them safe, stable, and out of the hospital. This bill means more families can get the right help, at the right time. Long-term viability of these services requires funding from all insurers, not just from Medicaid or time-limited federal grants.

MRSS Stand-Alone Service – H5527/S429

What It Does: Makes Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) a stand-alone service, with its own funding and billing—instead of an optional sub-contracted service of local community mental health centers (CCBHCs). MRSS is the gold standard for children's crisis services, making it a stand-alone service will make it sustainable and available statewide.

Why It Matters: Right now, crisis services for children vary widely. Making MRSS a stand-alone service, for any RI family in crisis, will help build a stronger, more reliable crisis system for Rhode Island's youth.

Community Health Worker (CHW) Insurance Coverage – H6117/S0705

What It Does: Requires commercial insurers to cover CHW services, just as Medicaid currently does.

Why It Matters: This bill enhances healthcare access and equity by ensuring the vital support services Community Health Workers provide have reliable funding streams to sustain them.

Funding for PediPRN & MomsPRN – H5461/S220

What It Does: Amends the state's healthcare services funding plan contribution of insurers to cover the cost of PediPRN & MomsPRN—programs that provide psychiatric consultation to pediatric & obstetric health providers to better support children, teens, and new moms facing mental health challenges.

Why It Matters: Most mental health concerns show up first in a doctor's office. PediPRN & MomsPRN help pediatric & OB providers get quick advice from psychiatrists or other mental health experts so families get the right care sooner. It's smart, effective support for those on the front lines everyday.

Strengthening Behavioral Health Services for Children – H5718/S0460

What It Does: Expands the role of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to oversee and manage comprehensive behavioral health services for children with serious emotional disturbances and developmental or functional disabilities-currently, children's behavioral health services are overseen by 7 different state depts.

Why It Matters: Too often kids with complex behavioral health needs struggle to get the help they need. This bill is a critical first step in creating the comprehensive system of care our state's children & families desparately need.

Take a Stand for Children's Mental Health and Support These Bills!

For more information, contact Susan Orban, Coalition Director, at wccc@washcokids.org

Why Support H6117/S0705 – Community Health Worker Insurance Coverage

H6117/S0705 mandates commercial insurers cover Community Health Worker (CHW) services, ensuring a another funding stream to support these vital services for those in need.

1. Ensuring Access to Care for All Rhode Islanders

- According to a report from the National Community Health Worker Association, CHWs reduce barriers to care by improving trust and engagement in health services, with studies showing a **30% reduction in missed appointments and 20% fewer hospital readmissions.**
- CHWs are essential in connecting individuals with healthcare resources, improving health literacy, and navigating complex healthcare systems. With over **30% of Rhode Islanders either underinsured or uninsured**, CHWs play a critical role in bridging this gap, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their insurance status, have access to the care and support they need.

2. Cost Savings: A Win for Both Patients and the Healthcare System

- According to the American Public Health Association, CHWs have been shown to **save the healthcare system an average of $1,500 per patient annually** by improving care coordination and reducing emergency care utilization.
- By supporting this bill, Rhode Island can save millions of dollars over time while improving health outcomes across the state.
- CHWs reduce healthcare costs by preventing hospitalizations, ER visits, and unnecessary treatments.
- A study in New York found that **for every dollar spent on CHWs, the healthcare system saved $2.30** in costs.

3. Strengthening the Local Workforce

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the demand for community health workers is growing faster than average, with **job growth projected at 21% over the next decade**, far outpacing the average for all other occupations.
- By ensuring reimbursement for CHW services, this bill will help build a sustainable workforce of locally trusted professionals who are committed to improving health in their communities in Rhode Island

4. A Growing National Movement with Proven Success

- In Minnesota, where CHWs are reimbursed by insurers, studies have shown that **CHWs reduce healthcare costs by up to 20%**, while improving patient satisfaction and engagement.
- Several states—such as Minnesota, Oregon, and New York—have already integrated CHWs into their healthcare systems with remarkable success. Rhode Island is positioned to lead in expanding access to CHWs, setting a precedent for other states to follow.

5. A Solution to Health Inequities

- A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that **CHWs can reduce health disparities in underserved populations by up to 45%** in some cases, particularly in the management of chronic diseases like diabetes and asthma.
- Rhode Island's minority populations experience higher rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, and have limited access to preventative healthcare services.
- CHWs provide culturally competent care that meets the needs of these communities. For example, Latino and Black populations in Rhode Island face higher-than-average rates of chronic disease, and CHWs can reduce these health disparities through education, outreach, and consistent care.