



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

October 11, 2019

The Honorable Bill Lee
Office of the Governor
600 Charlotte Ave
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

I am writing regarding the block grant proposal around TennCare. This proposal will affect access to mental health treatment for over 1 million vulnerable Tennesseans the program covers, especially those with low-income living with mental health conditions. These serious, all too often life-threatening—yet highly treatable—conditions combine to cost \$23 billion in work absenteeism and account for 90 percent of the nation's suicides.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading national peer-directed organization focusing on mood disorders reaching over 1,000 Tennessean's through the DBSA TN state organization and 11 chapters across the state. DBSA works to change the conversation around the issue of mental health through our mission to provide hope, help, support and education to improve the lives of people who have mood disorders. The opportunity to lead a thriving life begins with hope and for many continues with access to quality mental health care that meets individualized needs.

Depression is the number one cause of disability in the United States. Yet people living with mood disorders can and do lead quality productive lives when they have access to quality mental health services and products. Case in point, one study showed disability days for people experiencing severe depression are reduced by 36% once they improve and those experiencing moderate depression saw a reduction in disability days by 72%.¹

Investing in mental health is sound fiscal policy. Every \$1 invested in expanded treatment for depression and anxiety leads to a \$4 return in better health and enhanced labor participation and productivity.² Additional studies demonstrate that the presence of active behavioral health treatment reduces a patient's overall medical costs by 17% compared to control groups who did not receive care. Further, those in the control group actually saw health care costs rise by 12.3%.³

When treating mood disorders, one size does not fit all. DBSA encourages TennCare to provide beneficiaries a clear appeals process and consumer protections for any changes made to their prescription drug formulary.

The proposed waiver could put coverage at risk for people living with severe and persistent mental health conditions by capping federal Medicaid funding. Further, this strategy could expose Tennessee to financial risk if per-person TennCare costs grow substantially faster than expected, as could occur in a public health crisis (such as the opioid crisis) or due to innovations in medical treatment.

As I have outlined above, it makes sense fiscally to invest in mental health instead of cutting services, not only for the state budget, but also for the economy. That includes access to quality mental healthcare and medical products. Please do not move forward with block grant proposal as it is. Tennessee's need guarantees of access, which in turn, will create a much healthier and productive state with far greater savings.

Sincerely,



Phyllis Foxworth
Advocacy Vice President
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance



Daisy Jabas
President
DBSA Tennessee
State Organization

1. Von Korff, Ormel, Katon & Lin. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. February 1992.
2. Chisholm, et al. *Lancet Psychiatry*. April 12, 2016.
3. Chiles, Lambert & Hatch. *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice*. June 1999.