

PRESS RELEASE / ADVISORY

Behavioral Health “Promote Prevent” Legislative Commission

Releases Report, Offers roadmap for preventing behavioral health issues like addiction

PRESS CONFERENCE: 330PM, Thursday, House Members Lounge, 3rd Floor, State House

For More Information:

Commission House Chair, Rep. James M. Cantwell, 4th Plymouth District
617-722-2396 / james.cantwell@mahouse.gov

BOSTON, MA.... On Thursday, the Legislative Commission on Behavioral Health Promotion and Upstream Prevention released its report (available at promoteprevent.com) on promoting behavioral health and preventing issues like substance use, violence, suicide, and depression.

“This brilliant group of Commissioners coalesced around the belief that if the Commonwealth acts early, we can save individuals and families from tragedy and prevent downstream health, social service, and criminal justice costs,” said **Commission House Chair Rep. Cantwell (D-Marshfield)**. He said, “I’m grateful to the leaders who supported our work, especially Speaker DeLeo for speaking to our Commission and Secretary Sudders for lending many expert Health and Human Services officials, like Commissioners Mikula and Bharel, to advise this effort.”

The report follows 13-months of work by the 24-member body, including Sen. Patrick O’Connor; Chief Justice Paula Carey; David Seltz of the Health Policy Commission; Allison Bauer, Dir., Bureau of Substance Addiction Services; MA Public Health Assoc.; National Association of Social Workers; Assoc. of Behavioral Healthcare; SEL4MA, and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

Representative Kimberly Ferguson (R-Holden), appointed by the House Republican Leader to the Commission, said “the report is a testament to the incredible dedication, persistence, and genuine desire of the commission members to improve and save lives in the Commonwealth.”

The body’s recommendations focus on building the Commonwealth’s behavioral health promotion and prevention infrastructure by:

- Investing in locally-led prevention coalitions; school-based behavioral health promotion; and expanded data collection on behavioral health problems, risks, and protective factors
- Funding programs proven to promote social and emotional health and to prevent substance misuse and mental health conditions like depression and anxiety
- Educating law enforcement, educators, parents and other caregivers on how to promote children’s behavioral health and intervene early before problems become acute

State Representative Denise Garlick, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery, extended her thanks to the Commission for their efforts and said she was proud to “support the extensive work done by the commission to establish an evidence-based approach on engaging in the many aspects of behavioral health.”

To fund investments in prevention and promotion, the Commission unanimously recommended that the Legislature: (1) appropriate no less than 33% of cannabis revenues to community-based prevention; (2) establish an assessment on opioid prescription manufacturers or wholesalers; (3) pursue public-private partnerships; and (4) establish a “BeHAPPE” Trust Fund for investing in evidence-based community-, healthcare-, school-, and family- based initiatives.

Ray Tamasi of Gosnold addiction treatment & prevention center on Cape Cod, and the Governor’s community public health Commission appointee, said the body pinpointed “the programs, investments, infrastructure, and workforce challenges that must be addressed to help the Commonwealth avoid a future substance use or mental health crisis.”

To inform its report, the body engaged many leaders like Michael Botticelli, frn. U.S. Director of Drug Control Policy; public health leaders from the Berkshires to Cape Cod; and experts from the U.S. Institute of Medicine, Boston Children’s Hospital, and MA Assoc. for Mental Health.

The Commission partnered with the Pew-MacArthur Foundation Results First Initiative to help zero in on three overarching questions:

- What’s working in promotion and prevention?
- How can we better fund what’s working?
- What can the Commonwealth achieve if we fund what works?

Results First helped DPH and DMH teams conduct an advanced state-specific program inventory and cost benefit analysis that highlighted 12 prevention & promotion programs including:

- **Communities That Care:** builds local coalitions to implement evidence-based initiatives based on local needs, assets, and risks (\$2,986 per person benefits less costs)
- **Pax Good Behavior Game:** teaches 1st-graders self-regulations skills linked to academic success and improved behavioral health (\$11,031 per person benefits less costs)
- **Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools:** serves children exposed to trauma to prevent acute issues from developing (\$23,363 per person benefits less costs)

Promote Prevent Commission Paula M. Carey, Chief Justice of the Trial Courts, who helped the Commission partner with Results First, applauded the Commission’s “analytic approach to behavioral health” and said “in such a system, developed to use the best evidence-based and cost effective programming available to intervene at the earliest stages possible, many who would have become justice-involved will receive the services they need to address emerging health issues before they develop into acute and complex behavioral health needs.”

According to the report, an estimated \$6-7 billion is spent each year on behavioral health services and prescriptions in Massachusetts. But, despite the promise of prevention to reduce those and other costs, the state spends less than 1% on prevention across key agencies. For example, combined DMH and DPH’s Bureau of Substance Addiction Services will spend less than 1% on prevention, or 14.3 million of \$899 million in FY2018.

Considering the impacts of the opiate epidemic and that among states Massachusetts ranks 38th for drug deaths, 35th for excessive drinking, 28th for violent crime, and 21st for frequent mental distress, Cantwell emphasized “we must unleash the power of prevention.”