



**The Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research (CADER)**



October 6, 2020

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 254  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 109D  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Denise Garlick, Vice Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 238  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman, Vice Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 208  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: \$200K increase in funding for EOE Line Item #: 9110-1640, which funds Elder Mental Health Outreach Teams (EMHOTs)**

Dear Chair Friedman, Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Friedman, Vice Chair Garlick, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

**On behalf of the undersigned organizations and individuals, we are writing to ask you to support an appropriation of \$1,000,000 for EOE Line Item #9110-1640, which funds Elder Mental Health Outreach Teams (EMHOTs), which provide a range of essential services to some of the most vulnerable older adults across the state.**

This request, which reflects a \$200,000 increase over Governor Baker's H2 recommendation for the FY21 budget, would help to address the growing need for EMHOT services and reduce reliance on expensive congregate care settings such as nursing homes. These settings were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the imperative of decreasing reliance on such settings. Older adults face significant barriers to treatment including lack of transportation, isolation, high rates of stigma, and difficulty scheduling appointments due to co-occurring cognitive disorders.

These barriers are compounded for as many as 1 in 3 older adults who are living with a mental health or substance use condition. These older adults are at greatest risk for devastating and costly outcomes, including increased hospitalization and Emergency Department use, increased suicide risk, and

development of preventable complications of health problems such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Studies show that people with untreated behavioral health conditions are three times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home, and these admissions occur at a younger age.

**Successfully supporting older adults who have or are at risk for behavioral health conditions requires accessible in-home supports that foster engagement and trust.** Since its inception in 2016, EMHOTs have worked with older adults in their own homes to connect them with vital community services and resources addressing the broad range of needs associated with behavioral health issues, including housing insecurity, chronic diseases, loss of social connectedness, and financial challenges. In FY20, seven EMHOT sites serving 81 communities across the Commonwealth offered 7,504 hours of short-term counseling, case management, referral, and crisis intervention.

In FY20, based on the demonstrated success of this program, the Legislature funded two additional sites. Not surprisingly, however, the demand for services has grown much faster than this modest increase can support. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of older adults in crisis referred to EMHOTS increased 40%, and the number of older adults referred with both mental health and substance use conditions increased 45%. Accordingly, our request for a \$200,000 funding increase will expand the capacity of EMHOTS to deliver services throughout the state.

We recognize that FY21 presents difficult budget decisions. Increasing capacity to serve the most vulnerable older adults not only will improve their lives but may significantly reduce their use of hospitals, Emergency Departments, and nursing homes, all of which are costly and present significant risk of exposure to COVID-19. Therefore, we urge you to support this budget request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Jenifer Urff at [jeniferurff@mamh.org](mailto:jeniferurff@mamh.org).

Sincerely,



Cassie Cramer and Frank Baskin  
Co-Chairs, Massachusetts Aging and Mental Health Coalition

**Supporting Organizations**

Boston University Center for Aging & Disability Education and Research (CADER)  
Dignity Alliance of Massachusetts  
Greater Boston Legal Services  
Jewish Family and Children's Service  
Massachusetts Association for Mental Health  
Massachusetts Psychiatric Society  
Massachusetts Senior Action Council  
National Alliance on Mental Illness Massachusetts  
National Association of Social Workers – Massachusetts (NASW-MA)  
Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services

Attachments

cc: The Honorable Karen Spilka, Senate President  
The Honorable Robert DeLeo, Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means