

The Governor's budget directs \$1 million in both years of the biennium to establish a youth mental health credentialing database through a vendor contract. This initiative aims to enhance and streamline access to youth mental health services by ensuring accurate and comprehensive data on practitioners and providers.

Virginia is grappling with a shortage of youth mental health providers, compounded by the current system's inability to quickly identify available services for youth. Existing licensing applications lack specificity on whether professionals or services cater specifically to youth. Although the recent approval of the State Plan Amendment expands Medicaid reimbursement for broader mental health services for students, schools lack the necessary infrastructure to manage the network for these services and practitioners.

Here's how investing in a credentialing database for youth mental health services can make a significant impact:

1. **Building upon existing work:** Leveraging an established interagency committee among youth-serving agencies in the Commonwealth, including OCS, VDH, DJJ, DCJS, DMAS, DBHDS, and DSS, along with ad hoc participation by DOE. This initiative expands on the existing public-facing online registry for evidence-based practices, enhancing collaboration with the Virginia Center for Evidence-based Partnerships (<https://www.ebpreistry.org/>).
2. **Empowering mental health providers:** The database will allow mental health providers to easily submit and update information about their services, including appointment availability. It will set predefined standards to verify the accuracy of the data submitted, streamlining the identification of youth mental health providers and services.
3. **Supporting Local Education Agencies (LEAs):** The database will serve as a fundamental resource for LEAs, enabling them to swiftly determine school-based services eligible for Medicaid reimbursement. This minimizes administrative burdens for providers operating in multiple locations or schools.
4. **Resource for individuals seeking services:** The database will act as a valuable resource for individuals seeking youth behavioral health services, providing information on the type of services offered and time to the first appointment. This information is important for those in need of timely mental health support.
5. **Enhancing treatment matching:** By incorporating evidence-based practices, the database will ensure a better match between providers and the treatment needs of individuals with specific mental health conditions. This targeted approach improves the overall effectiveness of mental health interventions.

Investing in this youth mental health credentialing database is a strategic move to address critical gaps in the current system, streamline processes, and ultimately improve the accessibility and quality of mental health services for Virginia's youth.