



The Mental Health Association of Rhode Island is the watchdog of the mental health community. We advocate for increasing consumers' access to treatment and services and for improvements to Rhode Island's system of care. Our vision is that every Rhode Islander will have all the services and support needed to live their best life. Our work includes:

Policy & Advocacy

MHARI advocates for policies that improve mental health services, increase access to care, and reduce discrimination. We collaborate with policymakers to influence legislation and funding decisions, ensuring mental health is prioritized in public policy agendas. MHARI leads a coalition fighting to establish a working Olmstead Plan in the state, ensuring that individuals living with serious persistent mental illness and other disabilities have access to permanent supportive housing, employment, educational support, community services, transportation, and more.

Some of our 2022/2023 policy victories included:

- Passage of laws revising outdated licensing requirements for mental health counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists. The reforms will allow more qualified professionals to enter the field, thus increasing consumers' access to treatment.
- Persuading Rhode Island's leaders to assemble an Olmstead Planning Committee.
- Passage of legislation establishing Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC). MHARI helped persuade lawmakers to amend the legislation to ensure state fidelity to the evidence-based federal model.
- Helping six patients in a long-term care unit regain access to outdoor space. Some of these patients had not been allowed outside since 2020. The state ultimately cited the hospital for violating patients' rights.

Research

MHARI leads and collaborates in research initiatives to advance an understanding of the quality of the state's mental health system to meet the needs of the community. Between 2019 and 2023, MHARI conducted six substantive research projects on the status of behavioral health in Rhode Island. Visit www.MHARI.org/reports/ to read our research reports.

Awareness and Education

MHARI raises awareness about mental health, debunks stigma, and provides accurate information. We conduct educational campaigns, workshops, and public events to promote mental health literacy, help community members recognize signs of mental health conditions, and understand the importance of seeking help.

- Our signature annual event is the annual May is Mental Health Month state house rally and awards program. MHARI convenes partners to define a policy agenda and organize hundreds of Rhode Islanders to attend. This event raises the voice of those with lived experience on important policy issues to help build a better system for all Rhode Islanders.
- MHARI's RI Parity Initiative educates Rhode Islanders about their right to health insurance coverage for mental health treatment. MHARI has produced a series of bi-lingual videos and print materials to help Rhode Islanders understand their rights; facilitates workshops; and conducts research and advocacy to achieve the promise of mental health parity laws. To learn more visit: www.riparity.org.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Black, Indigenous, People of Color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community are underrepresented in behavioral health provider networks and as consumers of services and treatment. MHARI's DEI efforts fight racial bias and are included in all aspects of our work from policy development to community research to educational activities. Together with local colleges and universities, we award scholarships and internship stipends to students from diverse backgrounds who are studying to become the future generation of mental health clinicians.

Convening and Collaboration

Across the full scope of our work, MHARI convenes and collaborates with other stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, patients and family members, community organizations, and schools, to create a coordinated approach to positive systems change. This work includes:

- Convening stakeholders with a shared goal to achieve the promise of federal and state mental health parity laws and the intent to reduce cost barriers and expand health insurance coverage for mental health treatment and services.
- Collaborating with allies to create a shared vision to end the incarceration of people who have contact with law enforcement due to untreated symptoms of serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI).
- Collaborating with Rhode Island College and other local stakeholders to increase the size and diversity of Rhode Island's behavioral health provider network.