
Prevention Action Alliance

Ohio House Finance Health & Human Services Subcommittee Prevention Action Alliance March 2, 2021

Good morning Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Mental Health and Addiction Services panel and speak on House Bill 110, the state's biennial budget.

My name is Fran Gerbig, and I am the Executive Director of Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a 32-year-old statewide nonprofit organization based in Columbus, Ohio. We are dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. PAA offers a wealth of resources, training services, grants, and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields.

PAA is also a member of The Ohio Prevention Advocacy Network ("OPAN"), a coalition of prevention professionals and volunteers striving to establish safe, healthy, and stable communities by elevating the voices of Ohio's prevention experts.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services defines prevention as "the promotion of the health and safety of individuals and communities, focusing on reducing the likelihood of, delaying the onset of, or slowing the progression of or decreasing the severity of mental, emotional, and behavioral health disorders."

While the prevention of substance use and mental health diagnoses is often targeted to youth because of the developmental challenges fundamental in childhood and adolescence, prevention interventions must be integrated throughout the lifespan and through multiple life contexts. Investing in prevention by supporting developmentally appropriate prevention education strategies for all ages through Ohio's schools and workplaces as well as investment in community-based prevention strategies targeting Ohio's communities and populations will lead to reduced substance use and increased mental health wellness for individual Ohioans, Ohio's families, and Ohio's communities.

Tangibly, investment in prevention leads to:

- Fewer Ohioans needing treatment for substance use and mental health diagnoses.

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- Less strain on hospitals, long-term care facilities, and broader health-care system.
- Reduced challenges for the criminal justice system.
- Economic benefit for individual Ohioans and their families.
- Economic benefit for Ohio businesses.

PAA supports all current appropriations and items in the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' budget and is especially supportive of the language and funding tied to the Student Wellness and Success line item in the Department of Education's budget. PAA supports funding that ensures sustainability and emphasizes prevention strategies that are initiated at an early age, maintained across the lifespan and in diverse settings.

As Ohio communities continue to be impacted by addiction crises and mental health issues, we must recognize prevention as an essential part of the continuum of care and invest in critical prevention services, so we can effectively address and prevent these behavioral health problems. We need to provide Ohioans, their families, our schools and workplaces, and our communities with the tools and support necessary to both reduce substance use and mental health challenges and increase individual wellness, family sustainability, school and workplace success, and community growth and development.

With this recognition, Prevention Action Alliance and OPAN recommend funding fall into the following priorities:

1. School-based educational prevention services
2. Youth-Led prevention programs
3. Workplace-based prevention services
4. Community-based prevention frameworks and strategies:

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide comments as an interested party in consideration of HB 110 and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.