



The Council for Health and  
Human Service Ministries

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
#BeAVoiceCHHSM

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## BE A VOICE SUMMARY: MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

*All Be A Voice Health and Human Service Advocacy Toolkit sections are on the advocacy page listed on the bottom of this summary.*

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### BACKGROUND:

- There are many issues around mental health and substance use; but one of the largest contributing factors is trauma and the U.S. criminal justice system.
- Traumatic events can include childhood abuse, natural disasters, sexual violence, family separation, death of a loved one, a medical diagnosis, homelessness, experiencing oppression and discrimination, or viewing violence, including police brutality.
- Despite the overwhelming number of people who have experienced trauma, access to insurance and to mental health providers remains a serious problem.
- Severe lack of funding and resources creates an environment in which people facing mental health issues may engage in nonviolent “crimes of survival,” including theft for food, breaking and entering to find shelter, sleeping in public spaces due to homelessness, and drug possession as self-medication.
- The “War on Drugs,” begun in 1971, punitively targets people, not the drugs themselves.

### CURRENTLY:

- For people already experiencing mental health challenges or substance use disorders, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation and their need for help.
- Expanded mental health services are needed, including insurance coverage for therapy and ensuring affordable or no cost mental health services for people who have lost their jobs or insurance.
- The UCC’s Mental Health Network and Overdose and Drug Use Ministries advocate for people with mental health and drug use issues. Additionally, CHHSM brought a resolution recognizing opioid addiction as a public health epidemic to the UCC General Synod in 2019. It passed overwhelmingly.
- The UCC believes in advocating for the dignity of every human being and in overturning policies that undermine this belief, particularly people society-at-large has deemed unimportant, like those with mental illness and/or who use drugs.

### QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES:

- In what ways will you ensure that everyone will have access to mental health care? How are you working to destigmatize mental health coverage and to make sure that care is not reserved just for those who can pay out-of-pocket?
- In what ways will you remove barriers to substance use treatment and harm reduction services?
- The pandemic has caused many people to lose their jobs and their insurance. How will you bolster programs to help those who are uninsured access mental health services?
- Substance use treatment and harm reduction services need increased funding, especially now. How will you develop policies that are equitable and not based on a punitive model of care?