



## National Lieutenant Governors Association

### **NLGA State Strategies on Health** **Maryland Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford**

Since becoming lieutenant governor, I have focused on many issues impacting the health and safety of Marylanders. While the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated public attention, our state has not been immune to the numerous other health-related challenges facing residents. Gov. Larry Hogan and I continue our commitment to tackling those prevalent issues head-on.

#### **Combating the Opioid Epidemic**

As Chair of the [Maryland Heroin and Opioid Emergency Task Force](#) and the [Inter-Agency Heroin and Opioid Coordinating Council](#), I have prioritized the study and implementation of innovative, multi-pronged strategies to **tackle the opioid crisis through treatment, enforcement, prevention and education efforts.**

Our efforts have seen success. In 2019, the number of opioid-related deaths fell in Maryland for the first time since the crisis began. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, we have experienced an unfortunate increase in deaths from opioids and other substances in the first half of 2020. Despite this backslide, Gov. Hogan and I remain as committed as ever to addressing this issue and getting our state back on track.

Our proactive and rapid response focuses on **coordination among agencies, strategic planning and the distribution of resources across the state.** In June, the state released [Maryland's COVID-19 Inter-Agency Overdose Action Plan](#), a response strategy involving organizations throughout state government.

We are also devoting more resources than ever to fighting the scourge of drug addiction. At the end of August, Maryland's Opioid Operational Command Center awarded nearly \$10 million in state grant funding to support community-specific programs aimed at stopping substance use where it begins in each of the state's 24 jurisdictions. This funding is part of a \$50 million, five-year commitment that our administration announced in 2017.

Addressing the opioid and substance use crisis in Maryland remains one of our highest priorities and as long as this crisis poses a threat to Marylanders, we will persist in our efforts to eradicate it.

## **Improving the Delivery of Mental and Behavioral Health Services**

In January 2019, I announced the [Commission to Study Mental and Behavioral Health](#), created through an Executive Order signed by Gov. Hogan. As Chair, I have convened representatives from each branch of state government, representatives of several state departments, and members of the public. The Commission has been tasked with studying mental health in Maryland, including access to mental health services and the link between mental health issues and substance use disorders.

Within the Commission, four subcommittees were identified as being crucial to the study of the delivery of services: Crisis Services, Finance and Funding, Public Safety & Judicial System, and Youth & Families.

After holding several listening sessions across the state, initial recommendations included:

- Assessing the reciprocity standards for Professional Counselors and Therapists to increase access to qualified professionals from out-of-state or those professionals relocating to Maryland.
- Updating the “emergency facility” definition for individuals in crisis, to allow for psychological and mental health evaluations in facilities beyond hospital emergency rooms by proper eligible physicians and professionals.
- Implementing parity between behavioral and physical health coverage in Maryland to ensure equal coverage for mental health services as is provided for physical health services.

The Commission and subcommittees continue to meet regularly to advance the important work of connecting more Marylanders to the mental and behavioral health services they need. I look forward to reporting the successes of the Commission in the future.