

Questions for Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Commissioner Nominee

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Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Commissioner (CGS § 17a-451)

The commissioner establishes and enforces standards and policies for the treatment of people with psychiatric disabilities, substance use disorders, or both, in public and private facilities; may investigate the serious injury or unexpected death of anyone who received treatment within one year of the occurrence at a state-operated or -funded facility; coordinates and cooperates with state agencies providing services to children with mental disorders and adults with psychiatric disabilities, substance use disorders, or both; and is responsible for developing and implementing state mental health and substance use disorder plans.

Questions

1. Before becoming DMHAS commissioner, you served as deputy commissioner since 2015. Since transitioning to the commissioner role, what do you consider to be your greatest success? What has been the greatest challenge?
2. In recent years, the legislature has taken various measures intended to address opioid addiction. How would you assess the current state of the opioid epidemic in the state? What additional measures do you recommend?
3. Among the recent opioid-related laws, [PA 22-48](#) established an Opioid Settlement Fund, administered by a 37-member advisory committee with assistance from DMHAS. The law restricts the fund's use to specified substance use disorder abatement purposes. Can you

provide a status report on this law's implementation? When will eligible entities be able to apply for funds?

4. Another 2022 law ([PA 22-45](#)) made various changes to the laws affecting Whiting Forensic Hospital and Connecticut Valley Hospital, based in part on [recommendations](#) from a legislative task force established in 2018. In your view, what were the most significant components of that legislation? How would you assess the conditions at Whiting and Connecticut Valley Hospital compared to five years ago?
5. According to data from the DMHAS [website](#), for the week of January 16, 2023, there were 28 people on the department's waitlist for inpatient mental health beds across the state. Are there enough beds and resources to fill the current need?
6. In recent years, the legislature has taken various measures intended to retain and attract more behavioral health providers in the state. What additional measures do you recommend? What role has the telehealth expansion played in addressing issues concerning access to care?
7. A 2022 law required DMHAS, within available appropriations, to establish a psychedelic-assisted therapy pilot program, to be administered by a Connecticut medical school ([PA 22-146](#), § 20). The program must provide Connecticut veterans, retired first responders, and direct health care workers with MDMA- (i.e., "Molly" or "ecstasy") or psilocybin-assisted therapy as part of a federally-approved research program. What is the status of this initiative? What role, if any, do you believe these substances could play in behavioral health treatment?
8. Last November, DMHAS launched a public education campaign on cannabis ("[Be in the Know CT](#)"). According to the [press release](#), the campaign includes information on the new cannabis laws, the effects of cannabis, and resources to help mitigate harmful effects of cannabis. From a consumer safety perspective, how would you assess the state's transition to a recreational cannabis market? Are there particular issues that raise concerns?
9. A few years ago, DMHAS reorganized the Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHBs) and Regional Action Councils (RACs) into five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAOs). A 2022 act codified this reorganization ([PA 22-69](#)). How has this process affected service delivery?
10. July 2022 saw the rollout of "9-8-8" as the new number for the national suicide prevention lifeline. What steps have been taken to publicize the new number? What services are available to individuals who call it?
11. Relatedly, a new law requires DMHAS to make mobile crisis response services available to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week ([PA 22-81](#), § 1). What is the status of this service expansion?
12. Does DMHAS or its private providers have any problems finding sites for group homes? How does DMHAS work with communities in the siting process?

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