

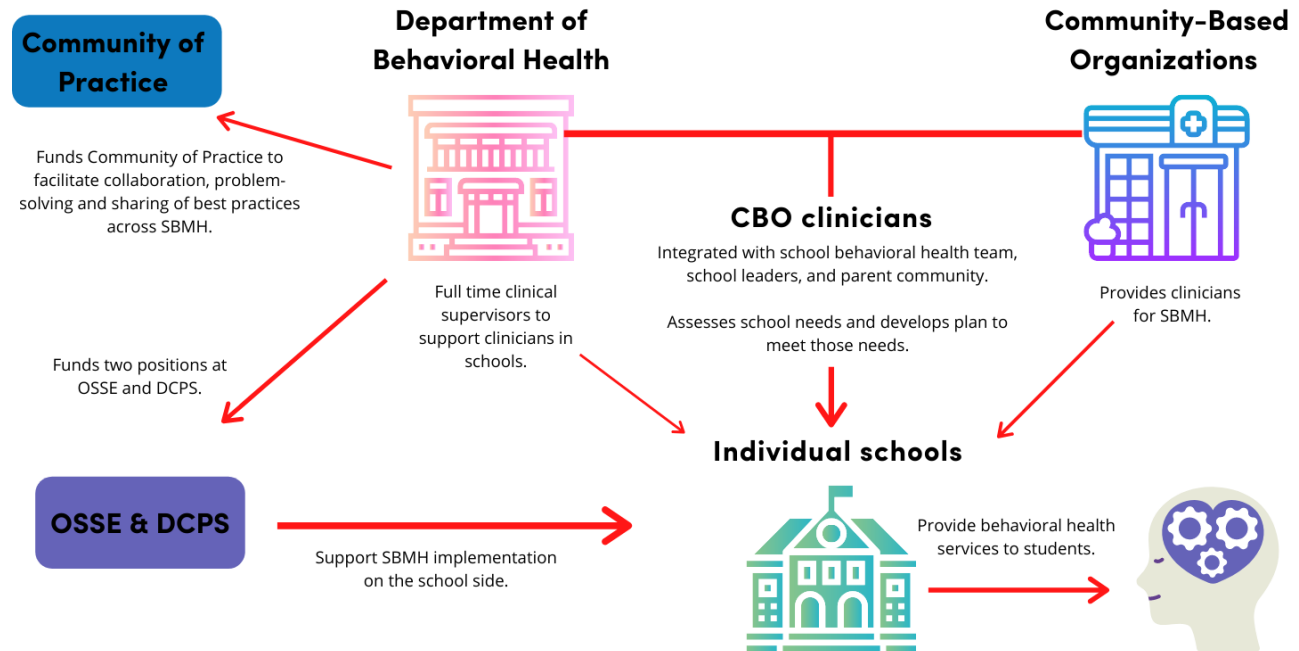
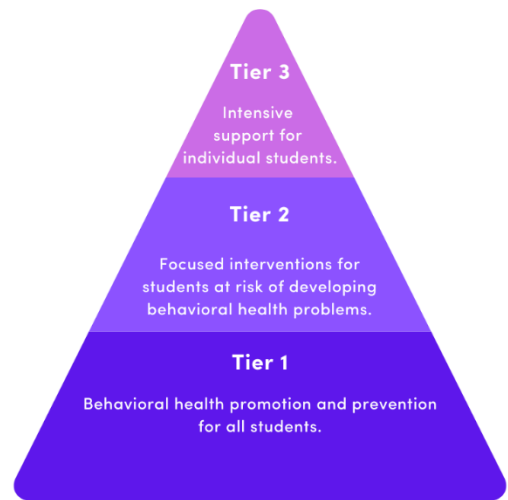
Children and Families in the District Need Access to Behavioral Health Services

Tens of thousands of children in the District struggle with behavioral health disorders, but only a fraction of them actually receive the behavioral health resources they need. This lack of timely, quality and appropriate behavioral health services is one of the greatest barriers to success for our kids. It also has devastating consequences: In 2019, about 1 in 3 DC middle school students and 1 in 5 high school students reported having seriously thought about killing themselves. As the pandemic continues and DC’s children and families suffer from ongoing trauma and insecurity, DC must meet the increased need for behavioral health services. Now is the time to invest in our behavioral healthcare system, including the School Based Mental Health Program (SBMH) and community-based organizations (CBOs).

School Based Mental Health Connects Children with Critical Services

One of the easiest ways to improve access to mental health care for children is to provide services where they spend most of their time: school. SBMH takes a public health approach and partners with CBOs to hire CBO clinicians for individual schools, offering behavioral health services to children in all DC traditional and charter public schools that participate in the program. The goal of SBMH is for all DC traditional and charter public schools to provide a full array of behavioral health supports at three tiers.

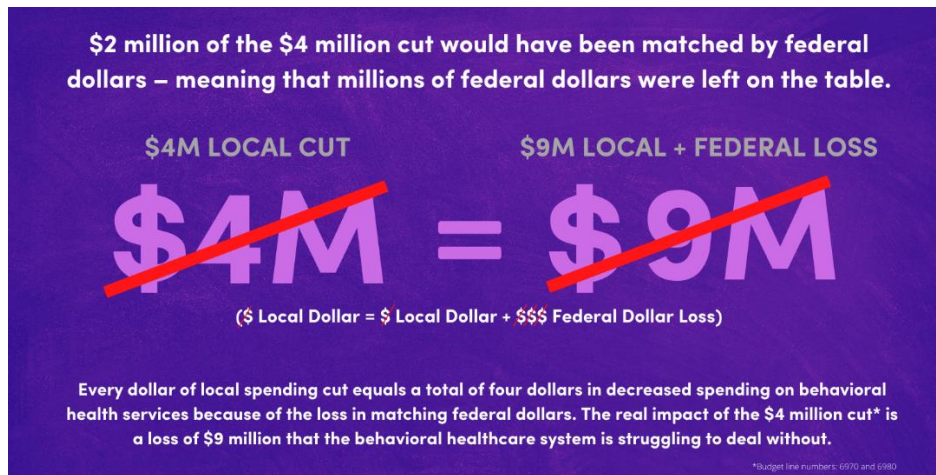
Through this interconnected system, SBMH clinicians currently provide critical behavioral health services to students in over 130 schools – regardless of whether students learn remotely or in-person.



A Struggling Behavioral Healthcare System

CBOs are a critical part of DC's behavioral health care system. CBOs and other providers that accept Medicaid are the only behavioral health services accessible to low-income DC residents. Yet at a time when CBOs and the behavioral health services they provide are more essential to the well-being of DC children and families than ever, investment in our behavioral healthcare system has decreased.

During the FY21 budget cycle, the Mayor proposed over \$21 million in cuts to spending on behavioral health services for DC residents. Had the DC Council not restored much of this funding, many CBOs would have been forced to close, further devastating our already fragile behavioral healthcare system. Still, the \$4 million in cuts the Council was not able to restore has had an outsized impact due to the loss of matching federal dollars:



“DC families were already dealing with a mental health crisis, and in light of all the changes and trauma associated with COVID-19, families will need even more support.” - Ward 8 parent

We Need More Spending on Behavioral Health, Not Less

The District's behavioral healthcare system cannot sustain further cuts. At minimum, the Mayor and the Council must return spending on behavioral health services to FY20 levels – recovering the \$5 million in federal funds that were left on the table – and expand SBMH to reach the more than 50 DC traditional and charter public schools that are not yet part of the program. If the District fails to prioritize funding behavioral health services:

- **DC children and families most vulnerable to insecurity and trauma will lose access to much-needed behavioral health services.** As we've seen during the public health emergency in particular, racial and income inequities will deepen as a result.
- **The District's already fragile behavioral healthcare system will be devastated.** We already don't have enough providers to meet the city's needs and more providers will be forced to close – making it even harder for families to access treatment and services.
- **The cost to the District of unmet behavioral health needs will multiply over time.** Meeting these needs is critical for residents to hold steady jobs; keep their families stable and together; and maintain safe and consistent housing.

We urge the Mayor and the Council to provide the essential funding needed to support our behavioral healthcare system and the DC children and families that depend on its services.

For more information, contact Qubilah Huddleston at qhuddleston@dcfpi.org or Tami Weerasingha-Cote at tweerasingha-cote@childrenslawcenter.org.