

FY2017

MENTAL HEALTH

OMBUDSMAN

ANNUAL REPORT

The Mental Health Ombudsman works to improve Montana citizens' access to public mental health services and to resources available when citizens are transitioning between services. This is our annual report to the Governor and includes recommendations for the continuing transformation of the public mental health system.

Mental Health Ombudsman Office

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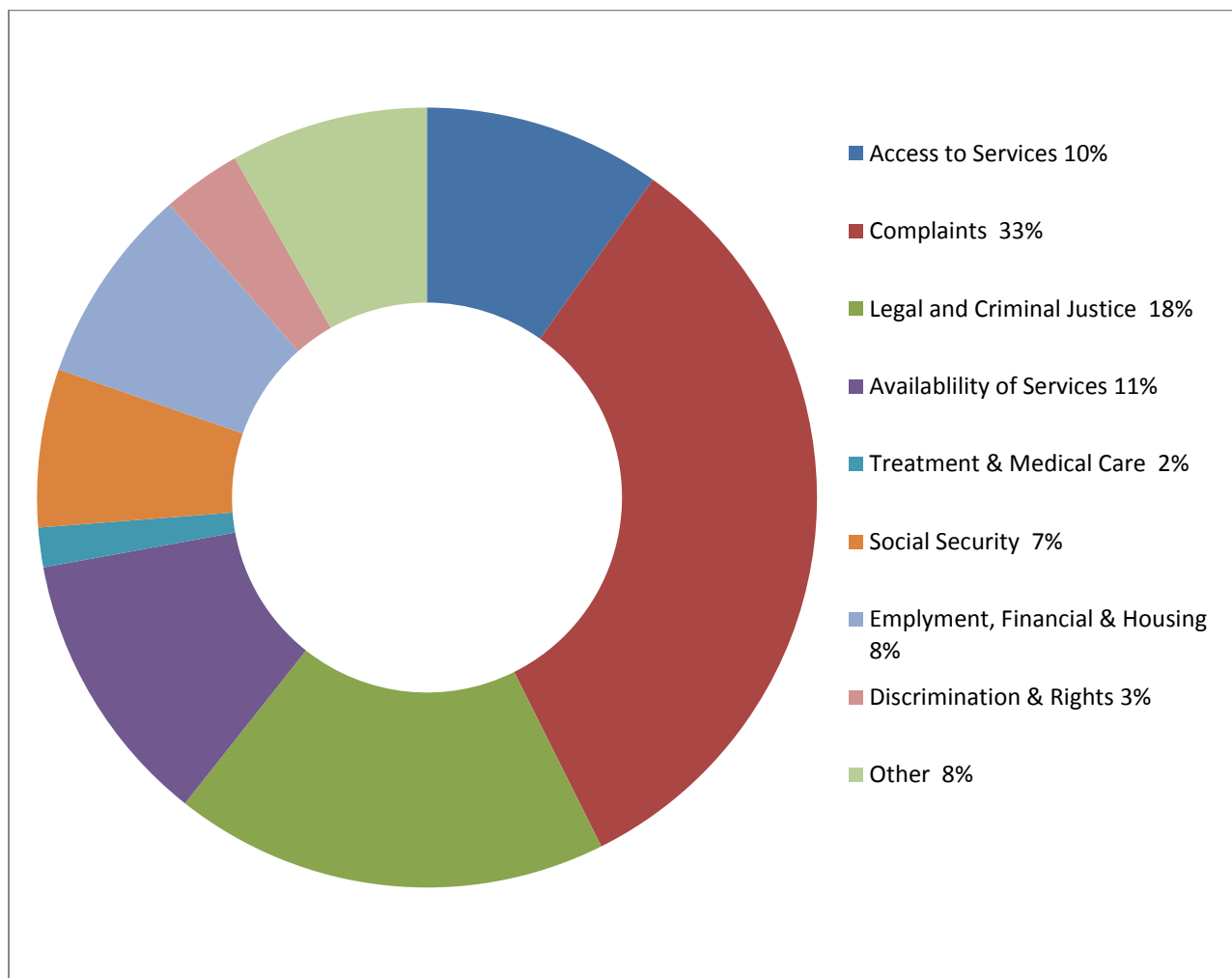
Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman - FY2017

1. From the period of July 2016 through June 2017, the Mental Health Ombudsman Office received over 435 calls. Some of the issues this office was contacted with include:
 - Limited availability and/or access for individuals regarding mental health services
 - Housing – very limited/no housing options
 - Lack of or limited access to mental health providers
 - Individual mental health rights
 - Access to mental health care within or transitioning from the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems
 - Access of mental health services for children/juveniles within the state

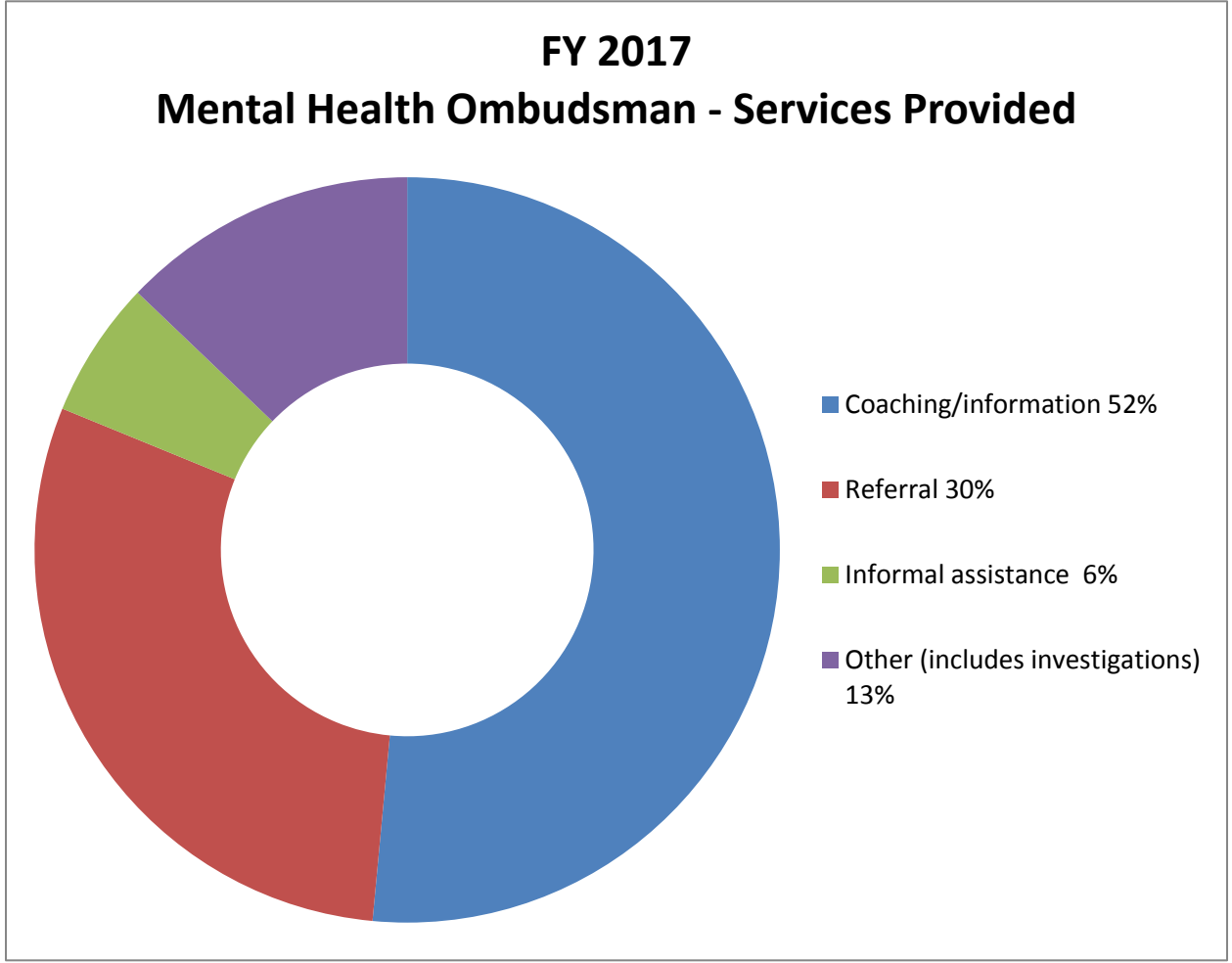
2. The Mental Health Ombudsman attended and participated in numerous meetings and on committees, including:
 - Service Area Authorities around the state (Western Service Area Authority, Central Service Area Authority, Eastern Service Area Authority).
 - Montana Mental Health Oversight Advisory Council (MHOAC)
 - Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities.
 - MACO Jail Advisory Group (JAG)
 - Montana Lifespan Respite Coalition
 - Local Advisory Councils (LAC)

3. The Mental Health Ombudsman was involved in many outreaches/activities throughout the state, including:
 - Assisted Montana Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors with some of their scheduled site visits to mental health facilities around the state.
 - Participating in multiple events around the state, including: Montana Conference on Mental Illness, Montana Recovery Conference, Montana Conference on Suicide Prevention, along with many others.
 - Involved in the Vision 21: Systems of Care for children and youth project (Office of Victims of Crime funded project).
 - Still very actively involved with CIT Montana, assisting with training and resources for law enforcement and mental health professionals regarding the Crisis Intervention Team model.
 - Continued into the second year, working with the Montana Suicide Prevention Coordinator and the EAP Program Manager, traveling throughout the state on the Suicide Prevention Campaign providing Suicide Prevention trainings and awareness to State of Montana employees.
 - Worked with various communities throughout the state: networking with the local mental health facilities/providers, providing training and services available through the Mental Health Ombudsman Office.

FY2017 Mental Health Ombudsman Statistics at-a-glance **(Inquiries)**



FY2017 Mental Health Ombudsman Statistics at-a-glance **(Services Provided)**



How We Help

Coaching/Information

Our first strategy to help someone resolve a problem is coaching. We try to give the callers enough information and confidence to address the problem themselves. We help to clarify the issue and to identify the resources available. Sometimes a caller is contacting us on behalf of a consumer. This includes mental health providers, such as a case manager, and family members of an adult. In that case, we can work with that person on behalf of the identified consumer.

Referral

When the Ombudsman is aware of another agency that can help the consumer more effectively than the Ombudsman, (or better source) of information, we may make a referral for that person that calls our office.

Informal Assistance

Many callers need information about something. The Ombudsman Office provides information about the mental health system and other systems used by people with mental illness as well as other resources

Other

Sometimes coaching isn't enough, and we need to provide more assistance or investigate the situation. The Ombudsman Office will routinely request a Release of Information from the person to verify we have their permission to investigate or look into the issues/concerns more in-depth.

Selected Cases

Case #1

The Mental Health Ombudsman was contacted by a case manager who had concerns for an adult that she works with. The client has a Special Needs Trust and a family member is the trustee. The concerns were the funds were being misappropriated and the issue needed to be addressed by an attorney, but funds were not available to retain an attorney.

The Ombudsman Office gave the case manager the contact information for the local Adult Protective Services to talk with them regarding this issue.

Case #2

Constituent called the Mental Health Ombudsman after receiving a bill for services from the local mental health center that were not covered by her insurance plan. The Ombudsman Office contacted the billing department for the mental health center and found that they had tried to work with the constituent towards a payment plan.

The Ombudsman Office talked with the constituent and helped them understand the situation with the insurance plan and what the mental health center covers. The Ombudsman Office was able to give the constituent some options and ways to work with the mental health center to take care of the issue.

Case #3

A mother of a thirteen-year-old boy contacted the Mental Health Ombudsman regarding getting day treatment services for the boy. She had understood that the boy had been accepted into a program but days before the program began, she was told the boy no longer qualified for the program. The mother attempted to communicate with the facility running the program but no one would return her calls.

The Ombudsman Office contacted the facility and explained the circumstances to them regarding this complaint. After several calls and talking with multiple individuals, the Ombudsman Office was able to find out that there had been a breakdown in the process and it was be resolved and the boy would be receiving the services requested.

Case #4

The Mental Health Ombudsman was contacted by a state employee after attending a suicide prevention presentation provided to state employees. From the presentation, the employee was inquiring about mental health services available for a family member. The employee's family member had run out of options and stated they did not know where to go next and how to better navigate the mental health system.

The Ombudsman Office talked with the individual and was able to provide connections for other resources and support groups.

MENTAL HEALTH OMBUDSMAN WORK PLAN 2017

The Mental Health Ombudsman shall represent the interests of individuals with regard to the need for public mental health services, including individuals in transition from public to private services. (M.C.A. 2-15-210)

Goal #1:

The Mental Health Ombudsman will actively engage with Montana's mental health facilities, mental health providers, mental health organizations, and State of Montana agencies associated with mental health, to discuss and have continuous dialogue regarding mental health issues and/or concerns.

Goal #2:

The Mental Health Ombudsman will continue to work on having and maintaining an internal database to use when providing coaching, assistance, and referrals for consumers and their family members.

Goal #3:

The Mental Health Ombudsman will maintain ongoing communication with the Governor's Office regarding major issues with the mental health system and the services that are available in mental health occurring throughout Montana.

Goal #4:

The Mental Health Ombudsman will take part in and contribute to activities that promote good mental health system services, including conducting community education, town meetings, and community activities that involve mental health activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Montana is still experiencing a workforce shortage in the mental health profession. We need to continue to look at ideas and work together collectively to find ways to help increase the mental health profession workforce in our state. Due to the budget cuts from the 2017 Legislative Session, we also need to continue to look for creative solutions to provide quality, appropriate public mental health services for our state. The following are the recommendations from my office:

- For the adult population, increase the amount of funding available for individuals and family members to use legal services for legal/housing consequences that occur as a result of mental illness.
- Assisting providers with the recruitment and retention of front-line mental health workers. This is the single most important hindrance to care in Montana – the fact that case managers, therapists, and social workers turn over and burn out at such a high rate.
- For the children in our state experiencing mental health issues or who are seriously emotionally disturbed, to improve the access to mental health services within the state rather than having to place them out of state.
- Improve the transition for youth leaving the children's mental health system and the needed services in the adult mental health system.
- Continue to work on improving the quantity, quality, and consistency of crisis services throughout Montana.
- Improve the transition to the community for those individuals with serious mental illness who are leaving a correctional facility.