



Question for Statewide Candidates

If elected, what will you do to support our mental health system to be as responsive as possible to adults, children and families in Mississippi who are affected by mental illness?

Response from Candidate for Governor Jim Hood

Mental Health is an issue that I've been focused on for years. Due to legislative underfunding of community mental health services, Mississippi was sued for not adequately providing mental health services out in the communities. Despite my repeated requests to increase funding for community-based services after handing over millions in recoveries, the legislature and Tate Reeves consistently failed to do so.

As a result, we see too many people relying on the mental health services most costly to governments: jails, emergency rooms, and inpatient hospitalization at psychiatric hospitals. As governor, I will advocate for increased funding for community based mental health services and a more centralized mental health system so families are able to receive the treatment they need before reaching crisis levels that can lead to hospitalization, incarceration, and homelessness.



In addition to underfunding from the state level, many of the 14 regional mental health centers experience financial trouble due to uncompensated care. Last year alone, Mississippi's community mental health centers provided more than \$33 million in uncompensated care to uninsured or underinsured patients. As governor, I'll work with the legislature to increase access to health coverage by accepting \$1 billion per year the federal government is offering us. In states that have done so, those suffering from mental health issues receive treatment, services, and medication at higher rates than those like Mississippi that have not accepted federal assistance.



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Response from Candidate for Governor Tate Reeves

Mental health will be a top issue for the next Governor of Mississippi, and if elected, I will work to continue to build on the progress we have made in our state's mental health system. As Lt. Governor, I pushed legislation to create a mental health advisory committee to bring together key stakeholders and come up with innovative solutions to problem areas in Mississippi's mental health system. I supported funding the Department of Mental health at the level it requested and increased investments in home and community-based care. And since 2012, we have seen a 46 percent increase in the number of people enrolled in the home and community-based waiver program.

But more work still needs to be done. I want to ensure all of our citizens are aware of the services offered by our federal, state, and local partners. We need to increase collaboration among agencies to bridge the gap between them to ensure all Mississippians are getting the care they need. We also need to recognize mental health issues as quickly as possible in our young citizens, which is why I would support programs that encourage mental health counselors in our state's schools to identify mental illnesses and develop a plan of action.



Mississippi is a national leader in telehealth infrastructure. As Lt. Governor, I have been a strong supporter of legislation that expands telemedicine capabilities throughout all regions of our state. This technology can be used to dramatically increase access and quality of mental health care in more remote and rural regions of our state as well as making care more affordable.

As Governor, I will prioritize improving our state's mental health system. From continuing to invest in new home and community-based care programs, to expanding telehealth resources to every area of the state, to incentivizing collaboration among primary care providers and mental health professionals to better treat patients, I will work to create new, innovative solutions that will benefit Mississippians living with mental illnesses.



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Response from Candidate for Lieutenant Governor Jay Hughes

I agree with the federal court decision that ruled Mississippi is violating the rights of those with mental illness, in part through over-institutionalization and even jail time in place of adequate community treatment options.

After public education my second biggest point is addressing mental illness and addiction. Those are major, major issues. And neither of those conditions discriminate between rich and poor, Democrat or Republican, white or black. Mental illness is very serious. It's impacted my family as has addiction.

So we've got to address it. We need better community resources available—a community mental health system as well as a state one.



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Response from Candidate for Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann

I have proposed most state agencies, not including Mental Health and Education and a few other exclusions, find 1 percent in savings. Savings realized will go toward a position realignment raise for all State employees, including our mental health workers who are woefully under compensated. This is not a silver bullet, but compensation is an issue which impacts turnover and quality of services in mental health.

I have had many conversations with educators, law enforcement officers, and others who are concerned about the impact of addiction, mental health issues, and lack of treatment are having on their communities. We will be proposing solutions based upon these meetings and working with individuals in the mental health field. We also need a wholesale evaluation of our mental health system, from access to treatment generally to the effectiveness of community mental health centers and inpatient facilities.



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Response from Candidate for Secretary of State Johnny Dupree

Inclusion is a key reason I've devoted my life to public service. As a teenage father who grew up in a single parent home, I know what it feels like to be counted out and it's not a good feeling; discouraging at times, quite honestly. However, my circumstances challenged me to determine at an early age if I would concede to others perception of me or define my own voice. I chose to have a voice, and as Mayor of Hattiesburg, I vowed to ensure the voices of fellow Mississippians were heard too, especially our most vulnerable community members.

Hattiesburg would not have become the first city in Mississippi to create a behavioral health court; the first to implement a program to end Veteran homelessness; and the only city in Mississippi to hire a homeless coordinator had we refused to engage the very people we were trying to help and invite them to be a part of the policy-making process from the beginning. How can you help someone, if you don't have a clear understanding of what they are up against?



As Secretary of State, I will continue to forge strong partnerships with mental health agencies statewide to not only protect the voting rights of those battling mental illnesses, but increase their access to the polls, and strengthen measures to protect their privacy. We have to remember, we are all in this together. Under my leadership, everyone will be encouraged to help create and implement policies that would design a better future for the current generation and the generations to come.



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Response from Candidate for Attorney General Jennifer Riley Collins

Mississippi citizens deserve access to comprehensive and consistent care, including mental healthcare. The government has a duty to provide mental, emotional and substance abuse treatment to those who may be in need. We need to provide accommodations for persons with mental infirmity in the same way we do for others with physical limitations. We need to make sure every one of our citizens can thrive to their maximum individual capacity. We need to provide accommodations for persons with mental infirmity in the same way we do for others with physical limitations. We need to make sure every one of our citizens can thrive to their maximum individual capacity. As Attorney General, I will be supportive of efforts that ensure people to have good health care and quality mental health services.

As Attorney General, I will will lead efforts to reverse the perpetuation of a system that overrelies on incarceration to address persons who should be treated. We must stop sending people to jail who need treatment and releasing people already caught in this vicious cycle of the criminal justice system without



treatment. As Attorney General, the state's top law enforcement officer, I will be supportive of expanded mental health courts and will work with state agencies to establish legal supports to these courts and the communities they serve.

Mississippi, like many other states is suffering from an opioid crisis. The often overlooked victims of this epidemic are the children of parents who suffer opioid and other substance abuse issues. The early trauma exposure makes children more likely to suffer later mental health disorders including substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. As Attorney General, I will hold pharmaceutical companies liable and would make recommendation to the legislature to utilize proceeds derived from the current and any new litigation brought by the Attorney General's office regarding opioids to be used to increase capacity for mental health treatment for impacted children.

As Attorney General, I will also establish a unit to monitor and ensure compliance with court-ordered outpatient treatment for persons in the care and custody of the state, including management of the court-ordered evaluation system for sanity and competency of criminal defendants.