



EMBARGOED UNTIL 5:00 PM
February 23, 2024

CONTACT:
Shannon Hall, Executive Director
(202) 302-8397

**ADVOCATES CALL ON MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
TO PRESERVE TREATMENT CAPACITY FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS
IN FACE OF OPTUM CYBERATTACK**

[BALTIMORE (February 23, 2024)] – Today, the Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland (CBH) called on the Maryland Department of Health to take steps to preserve behavioral health treatment capacity in the face of Optum’s cyberattack.

Optum has a contract with the Maryland Department of Health to process and pay claims for mental health and substance use disorder treatment. On February 21, Optum was subject to major cyberattack. The American Hospital Association issued a statement recommending that **“all health care organizations that were disrupted or are potentially exposed by this incident consider disconnection from Optum until it is independently deemed safe to reconnect to Optum.”** It also is recommended that organizations which utilize Optum’s services prepare related downtime procedures and contingency plans should Optum’s services remain unavailable for an extended period.”

To date, neither Optum nor the Maryland Department of Health have communicated what impact the cyberattack will have on Optum’s ability to pay Maryland claims. Providers who use Optum vendors to submit claims are currently unable to do so.

Shannon Hall, Executive Director of CBH, noted that Maryland’s behavioral health providers lack the financial resources to weather downtime by Optum’s claims processing system. “Maryland’s behavioral health providers have tapped out their assets and often maxed out lines of credit to pay back estimated payments from Optum’s previous dysfunction,” said Hall. “Throughout the fall and winter, many of our members have struggled to make payroll because Optum has slowed down payments on the claims that it manually processes.”

Optum’s failures and the state’s recoupment policies have left Maryland’s behavioral health providers without the financial resources to weather further payment disruptions by Optum.

“It’s time to have a Plan B to pay Maryland’s mental health and addiction treatment providers to ensure that they can continue to pay their staff,” said Hall. **“Patients and families depend on us, and our providers cannot afford to go offline just because Optum can’t pay the bills on time.”**

###