



## *House Budget and Research Office*

COVERDELL LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 412  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30334  
404-656-5050

CHRISTINE MURDOCK  
DIRECTOR

---

### **2023 SESSION: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS**

The agencies within the health and human services budget area provide essential services for Georgia's most vulnerable citizens and families, including children, and low-income individuals and account for 24% of the FY 2024 state budget or \$7.7 billion. The General Assembly continues to support and invest in these areas of the budget by providing an infusion of funds for mental health services, rate increases for health and human service providers, access to health care, and salary increases for critical positions.

#### **Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities**

- In HB 18, the Amended FY 2023 budget, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) receives \$9.9 million to renovate the kitchen at Georgia Regional Hospital in Atlanta. Additionally, the General Assembly restores \$987,115 to open offline psychiatric beds at Georgia Regional Hospital.
- HB 18 includes \$2 million for contract psychiatric beds, \$825,000 to address homelessness in the Atlanta area, and \$100,000 to support grandparent-led families.
- The Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) program receives \$100,000 in the Amended FY 2023 budget for technology infrastructure and environmental adaptations for enrolled students.
- HB 19 appropriates \$2.4 million for substance abuse recovery programs including addiction recovery support center expansion, peer workforce training, and the certified addiction recovery empowerment specialists (CARES) warm line.
- The General Assembly adds 500 slots to the New Options Waiver (NOW) and Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program (COMP) for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with an appropriation of \$9.4 million.
- The FY 2024 budget provides \$24.5 million to support the establishment of three behavioral health crisis centers in Augusta, Dublin, and Fulton County.
- An additional 250 slots are added to the Georgia Housing Voucher program in the FY 2024 budget to help those experiencing mental illness obtain permanent housing.
- The department receives \$10.1 million to increase the salaries of state psychiatric hospital employees and \$1.5 million for pay raises to forensic peer evaluators and forensic peer mentors to support hiring and retention efforts.
- HB 19 includes \$1.6 million to support the behavioral health needs of children and adolescents across the state; \$200,000 for the Georgia Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) program to expand services; and \$578,150 to support those living with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families with other services, including advocacy and referral linkage.

## Human Services

- In the Amended FY 2023 budget, the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) receives \$10 million to provide alternative housing options for youth with complex needs in the care of the Division of Family and Children Services. Additionally, DHS receives \$4 million for technology improvements and security upgrades for federally-provided benefits and reduce fraud.
- In the FY 2024 budget, the court appointed special advocates (CASA) program receives \$750,000 for enhanced statewide capacity.
- The Department of Human Services is appropriated \$7.1 million for services for older Georgians, including enhanced capacity for the Long-term Care Ombudsman program, respite care programs, and over 2,500 slots for non-Medicaid home and community-based services.
- The FY 2024 budget includes \$11.1 million for staffing needed for the upcoming Medicaid redetermination due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ending. Additionally, the Amended FY 2023 budget includes \$8.4 million for staffing and technology needed for Medicaid redetermination.
- The General Assembly provides \$5 million in HB 19 to provide alternative housing options for youth with complex needs in the care of the Division of Family and Children Services. Additionally, \$15.2 million is appropriated for Child Caring Institutions to cover the loss federal Foster Care Title IV-E funds.
- The Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund Commission receives an additional \$3.4 million to assist in the rehabilitation of victims of sexual trafficking.
- [HB 129](#) (Rep. Soo Hong, 103<sup>rd</sup>) expands the eligibility criteria for temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) to pregnant women.

## Medicaid

- The Amended FY 2023 budget recognizes \$505.9 million in savings in the Medicaid programs due to a temporary 6.2% increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Additionally, HB 18 provides \$278 million for growth in the Medicaid programs to meet the projected need resulting from increased utilization and enrollment during the pandemic.
- The General Assembly supports Medicaid providers in the FY 2024 budget with \$42.2 million in reimbursement rate increases including: \$18.7 million for primary care and OB/GYN providers; \$8 million for speech-language pathology, audiology, physical therapy, and occupational therapy providers; \$10.5 million for home and community-based service providers; \$854,167 for Georgia Pediatric Program (GAPP) providers; \$1.3 million for occupational and physical therapy assistants in the Children's Intervention Services (CIS) program; \$1.1 million for emergency medical services (EMS); and \$621,296 for low-volume pharmacies.
- HB 19 increases access to oral health care by including \$2.8 million to provide dental coverage for adult members of Georgia Medicaid. Current adult dental coverage is only for emergency services, and this increases coverage to 105 procedure codes currently covered under the children's dental program.

## Public Health

- In the Department of Public Health, the General Assembly provides \$1.7 million for a pilot program authorized in SB 106 (2023 Session) to provide home visiting in at-risk and underserved rural communities during pregnancy and early childhood to improve birth outcomes, reduce preterm deliveries, and decrease infant and maternal mortality.

- The FY 2024 budget includes \$463,675 to support the Sickle Cell Foundation of Georgia for additional staffing support as well as \$50,000 in the Department of Community Health for the Georgia Council of Lupus Education and Awareness to support research, data collection, awareness, and education.
- The General Assembly agrees with the governor to fund \$931,111 for a total of \$1.1 million for the continued expansion of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services in Georgia.
- HB 19 provides \$150,000 for feminine hygiene products for low-income clients at community organizations; this is in addition to the \$1.5 million provided to the Department of Education for feminine hygiene grants to school systems serving low-income students.
- [HB 416](#) (Rep. Deborah Silcox, 53<sup>rd</sup>) allows for qualified pharmacy technicians to administer any COVID-19 vaccine and any vaccine on the adult immunization schedule to individuals 18 years of age or older. The supervising pharmacist will have discretion over delegating the authority to administer vaccines and must be readily available to the pharmacy technician when a vaccine is being administered.
- [SB 1](#) (Sen. Greg Dolezal, 27<sup>th</sup>) removes the sunset on the prohibition that prevents state and local governments from requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of providing services, accessing a facility, issuing licenses or permits, performing duties, and other matters.
- [SB 46](#) (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, 52<sup>nd</sup>) requires that a pregnant woman be tested for HIV and syphilis by their prenatal provider at their first prenatal visit, at 28-32 weeks gestation, and at delivery. The patient will have the option to opt out of such testing.
- [SB 47](#) (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, 52<sup>nd</sup>) adds the smoking of electronic smoking or vaping devices to the 'Georgia Smoke-free Air Act of 2005'.
- [SB 106](#) (Sen. Larry Walker III, 20<sup>th</sup>) creates a Medicaid program to provide remote maternal health clinical services to women with high-risk pregnancies and creates a home-visiting pilot program through the Department of Public Health.
- [SB 107](#) (Sen. Max Burns, 23<sup>rd</sup>) requires the Department of Public Health to develop a model safety plan for private swim instructors to utilize by January 1, 2024. The plan will include minimum standards for student-to-instructor ratios, secondary supervision recommendations, parent or legal guardian attendance, and use of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification. All private swim instructors are required to have an aquatic safety plan by April 1, 2024.

### **Insurance**

- [HB 85](#) (Rep. Sharon Cooper, 45<sup>th</sup>) requires health benefit policies to include coverage for biomarker testing for diagnosis, treatment, management, or ongoing monitoring of a disease or condition.
- [HB 315](#) (Rep. Darlene Taylor, 173<sup>rd</sup>) involves cost-sharing requirements for diagnostic and supplemental breast screenings. The bill allows the commissioner of insurance to apply rules and regulations regarding cost-sharing provisions based on guidelines established by professional medical association.
- [SB 20](#) (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick, 32<sup>nd</sup>) requires insurers to contract with and maintain a sufficient and appropriate number of participating network providers. Additionally, insurers are prohibited from denying preauthorization of services that were rendered by an in-network provider because the referring provider is out-of-network. The bill gives the insurance commissioner authority to review network adequacy.
- [SB 65](#) (Sen. Ben Watson, 1<sup>st</sup>) allows the state to establish a state-based healthcare exchange.

## **Additional Health Highlights**

- The FY 2024 budget promotes additional access to health care by providing \$500,000 for two new federally qualified health center start-up grants; \$950,000 for Mercy Care Atlanta to address the large patient volume after the Atlanta Medical Center closure; and \$500,000 for charity clinics statewide.
- HB 19 provides a total of \$3.9 million for new graduate and undergraduate medical education programs, including \$2 million for 116 new residency slots in primary care medicine; \$582,338 for child and adolescent psychiatry and maternal fetal medicine fellowships at the Medical College of Georgia; and \$240,000 for the start-up of a new rural OB/GYN training program as well as \$1 million to increase the medical school class size at the Morehouse School of Medicine.
- Hospitals starting graduate medical education (GME) residency programs are supported with \$4 million in the FY 2024 budget for one-time grants of up to \$1 million for hospitals with GME programs to fund medical education training equipment and infrastructure needs to support new and expanding residency programs, with priority given to new and rural sites and including Colquitt Regional Medical Center and Archbold Medical Center. Additionally, \$225,000 is provided for three feasibility grants to assist hospitals in establishing or expanding GME programs.
- HB 19 provides \$663,114 for the fourth year of the seven-year plan to support the Mercer School of Medicine's medical school campus in Columbus, bringing the total annual amount to \$7.9 million.
- Healthcare providers are supported in HB 19 with a total of \$3.1 million for loan repayment programs for providers practicing in rural areas and educating future providers, including \$850,000 for a new mental health professionals program, \$1.56 million to increase the amount awarded to rural physicians; \$440,000 for additional repayments for physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses; and \$250,000 for a new nursing faculty program.
- In the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) budget, the General Assembly agrees with the governor to increase the employer contribution per-member, per-month (PMPM) rate for certified school employees to \$1,580, effective January 1, 2023, and \$846.4 million is funded in the Department of Education and \$8.2 million in the Department of Early Care and Learning to fund this rate increase. Additionally, the FY 2024 budget reflects a \$500 increase in employer contribution PMPM for non-certified school employees phased in over two years, effective January 1, 2024, and reflects a minimum employer contribution of \$1,580 PMPM, effective January 1, 2026, in order to maintain the fiscal soundness of SHBP.
- [HB 203](#) (Rep. Mark Newton, 127<sup>th</sup>) prohibits the writing of a contact lens prescription by any prescriber unless that state-licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist has completed all measurements, tests, and examinations necessary to satisfy their professional judgment that the patient is a viable candidate to wear contact lenses, and has evaluated and fitted the contact lenses to the patient's eyes.  
The bill creates an assessment mechanism for conducting an eye assessment or generating a contact lens or spectacle prescription, and sets regulations for use of an assessment mechanism. The bill requires a prescriber using electronic prescriptions be held to the same standards of care as those used in traditional in-person clinical settings.
- [HB 309](#) (Rep. Sharon Cooper, 45<sup>th</sup>) requires assisted living communities and personal care homes to provide a financial stability affidavit to the Department of Community Health upon initial application and change of ownership. The department is directed to create a financial stability affidavit form to determine the applicant's financial viability.
- [HB 383](#) (Rep. Matt Reeves, 99<sup>th</sup>) is known as the 'Safer Hospitals Act'. The bill defines the term "healthcare worker" as any employee or independent contractor of a hospital or other healthcare facility. Increased

penalties are added when someone commits aggravated assault against a healthcare worker or an emergency health worker located on a hospital campus. The penalty is imprisonment between three to 20 years.

The bill increases penalties for committing aggravated battery against a healthcare worker or an emergency health worker located on a hospital campus. The penalty is imprisonment between three to 20 years.

A new chapter in the Code is created that defines "hospital", "hospital campus", and "hospital peace officer". The provisions allow a hospital guard to have arrest powers while on a hospital campus, and hospital security who are certified by the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) can be authorized by a hospital to carry a firearm or weapon. Each hospital that employs law enforcement are required to report to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) and local law enforcement incidents of criminal gang activity that occurs on or adjacent to the hospital campus. The bill requires records not protected under a state disclosure law to be available for public inspection. The bill is effective July 1, 2023.

- [HB 440](#) (Rep. Doug Stoner, 40<sup>th</sup>) allows public and private schools to stock a supply of glucagon, and permits prescribers to provide such medication to schools.
- [HB 453](#) (Rep. Scott Hilton, 48<sup>th</sup>) repeals the annual ambulance service license fee that is required for ambulance service providers.
- [HB 493](#) (Rep. Matt Hatchett, 155<sup>th</sup>) relates to continuing competency requirements for registered professional nursing licenses and adds federally operated healthcare facilities as an eligible facility to verify competency.
- [HB 497](#) (Rep. John LaHood, 175<sup>th</sup>) authorizes the use of certified medication aides in penal institutions. The aide must keep a record of all medications that have been administered and detail any changes to the inmate's condition. An employer of a certified medication aide must annually administer a comprehensive clinical skills competency review to each aide. All aides must receive ongoing medication training.
- [SB 61](#) (Sen. Brian Strickland, 17<sup>th</sup>) repeals the sunset clause of the provision that requires employers who offer sick leave to employees to allow an employee to use that sick leave for the care of an immediate family member.
- [SB 140](#) (Sen. Carden Summers, 13<sup>th</sup>) prohibits the use of sex reassignment surgeries and hormone replacement therapies on minors in a licensed institution for the treatment of gender dysphoria. Exceptions include treatment of sex development disorders, androgen insensitivity syndrome, and other medical conditions. Additionally, minors who began hormone replacement therapies before July 1, 2023 are exempt. Licensed physicians in violation will be held administratively responsible by the medical board.
- [SB 164](#) (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, 52<sup>nd</sup>) creates licensure requirements for advanced practice registered nurses and changes the definition of "advanced practice registered nurse" (APRN) to only a person licensed by the Georgia Board of Nursing who is either a certified nurse midwife, certified nurse practitioner, certified registered nurse anesthetist, clinical nurse specialist or clinical nurse specialist in psychiatric/mental health, or a recognized APRN before June 30, 2006. The bill makes it a misdemeanor to practice as an APRN without a license.

The bill adds anesthesiologist assistant to the Georgia Composite Medical Board in an advisory-only capacity to the board, and to the board-appointed Physician Assistants Advisory Committee. Section 6 of SB 164 is the 'Anesthesiologist Assistant Act', which creates the licensure of anesthesiologist assistants through the Georgia Composite Medical Board, and provides for licensure and renewal requirements. This bill allows for anesthesiologist assistants to perform duties and responsibilities as

delegated by the supervising anesthesiologist, and requires the supervising anesthesiologist or an alternate supervising anesthesiologist to be immediately available to intervene if needed during the delivery of care.

The bill allows for a supervising anesthesiologist to delegate to an anesthesiologist assistant the authority to order controlled substances, dangerous drugs, medical treatments, and diagnostic studies. The bill states that the board can issue a previously revoked license under certain conditions after rehabilitation, and makes it a misdemeanor to practice as an anesthesiologist assistant without a license. Authority is granted for an anesthesiologist assistant to provide care for up to 48 hours during a state of emergency or public health emergency.

- [SB 197](#) (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, 52<sup>nd</sup>) amends the 'Consumer Information and Awareness Act' to prohibit an advertisement or identification by a healthcare practitioner that includes deceptive or misleading terms or false representation or references to medical or medical specialty titles, unless the practitioner is a licensed physician.

The bill requires advanced practice registered nurses and physician assistants to verbally identify themselves during each patient interaction and clearly state they are not a medical doctor if they hold a doctorate degree and identify themselves with the title "doctor".

- [SB 199](#) (Sen. Jason Esteves, 6<sup>th</sup>) authorizes the state's Employee Benefit Plan Council to provide health savings accounts as part of the flexible employee benefit plan for state employees, public school employees, and teachers. The bill provides discretion to the council on whether to provide flexible benefit deductions or salary reductions, and allows the flexible benefit plan to continually provide deductions or salary reductions related to health savings accounts starting January 1, 2025.
- [SB 223](#) (Sen. Ben Watson, 1<sup>st</sup>) requires all sponsors of cancer clinical trials to provide potential patient-subjects with information on whether reimbursement will be available for travel, and ancillary costs for patient-subjects and those who accompany the patient-subject for support.

The bill states reimbursements are provided to eliminate financial barriers to enrollment and will not be considered an undue inducement or coercive. All information provided will be reviewed by the relevant federal institution. The nature of ancillary support and guidelines on financial eligibility will be disclosed and conform to federal law.