

# **FY 2024 MENTAL HEALTH OMBUDSMAN Annual Report**

---

## **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**

P.O. Box 200804

Helena, MT 59620-0804

Toll-free (888) 444-9669

FAX (406) 444-3543

Website: [www.mhombudsman.mt.gov](http://www.mhombudsman.mt.gov)

Facebook: Montana MH Ombudsman

**Dennis Nyland, Mental Health Ombudsman**

Phone: (406) 444-9669

E-mail: [dnyland@mt.gov](mailto:dnyland@mt.gov)

**Christina Ward, Mental Health Services Specialist**

Phone: (406) 444-9661

E-Mail: [Christina.Ward@mt.gov](mailto:Christina.Ward@mt.gov)

## **Office of the Mental Health Ombudsman – FY 2024**

1. From the period of July 2023 through June 2024, the Mental Health Ombudsman Office received approximately 300 calls. Issues of concern presented to this office included:

- Limited availability and/or access for adults regarding mental health services
- Lack of and/or limited access for individuals to mental health providers
- Very limited availability and/or access for children/juveniles within the state
- Individual mental health rights

These calls consisted of contacts made through telephone calls, emails to the Mental Health Ombudsman Office, through interactions in the communities, and occasionally through walk-ins to the Mental Health Ombudsman Office.

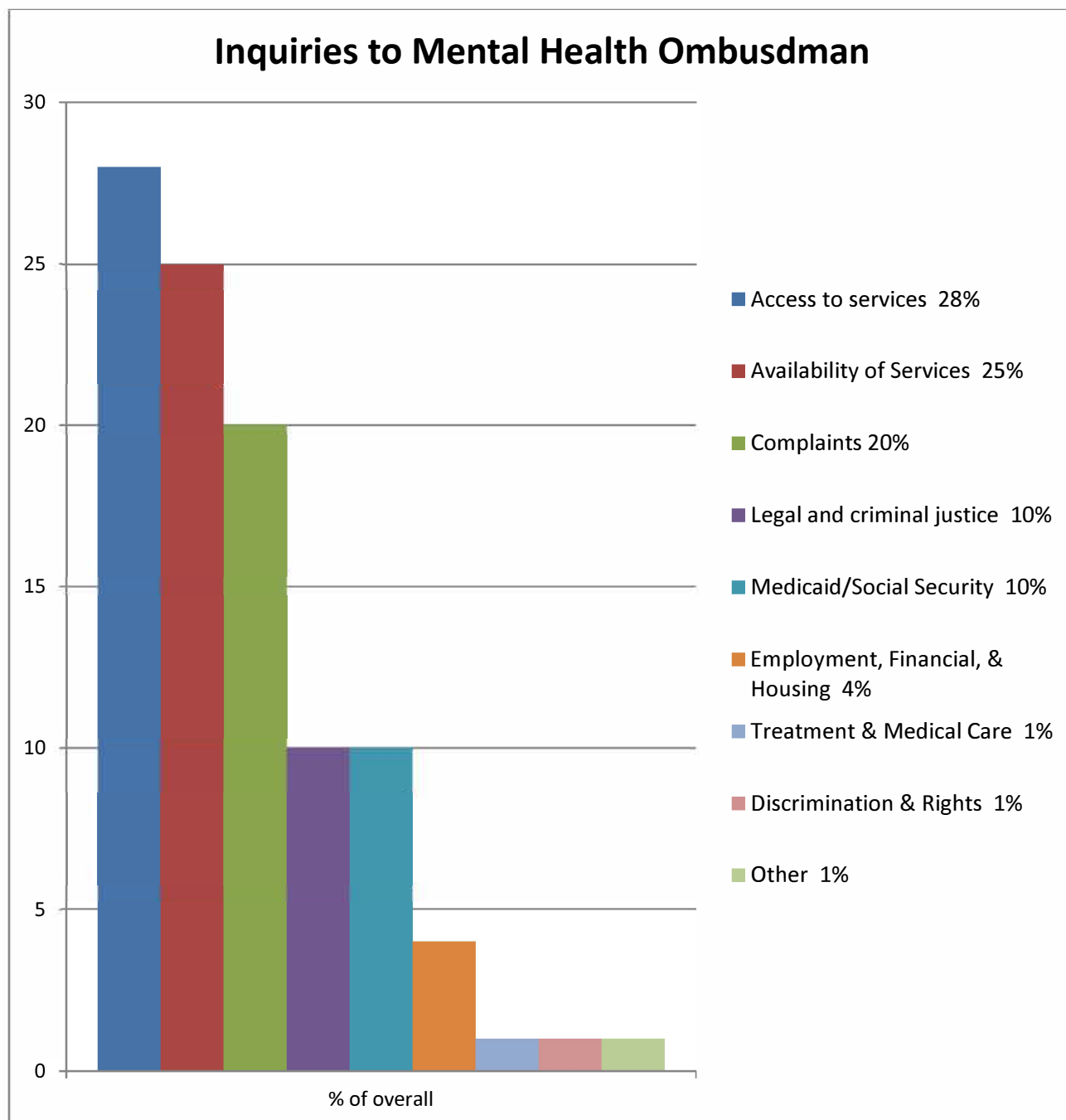
2. The Mental Health Ombudsman actively participated in numerous meetings and committees around the state, including:

- Service Area Authorities (Western Service Area Authority, Central Service Area Authority, Eastern Service Area Authority) and Local Advisory Councils (LAC).
- BHDD (Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Division of DPHHS) weekly and monthly meetings.
- Behavioral Health System for Future Generations (BHSFG) Commission meetings.
- Montana Mental Health Oversight Advisory Council (MHOAC)
- Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Montana Lifespan Respite Coalition
- Local Suicide Prevention Coalition

3. The Mental Health Ombudsman was involved in many outreaches/activities throughout the state, including:

- Invited and continued participation in multiple annual mental health events around the state, including Montana Conference on Suicide Prevention, Montana Mental Health Conference, Montana Recovery Conference, Annual Survivors of Suicide Loss Day, Out of the Darkness Campus Walk, along with many others.
- Assisted Montana Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors with site inspections around the state as well as participating in their Annual Board Meeting.
- Actively involved with CIT Montana, assisting with training and resources for law enforcement and mental health professionals regarding the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Memphis model. Assisted in instruction and provided mental health resources to numerous statewide CIT Academies. Continue working as a board member on the CIT Montana Board of Directors.
- Continue to work with a local group on a Lethal Means Program. This group has developed materials (posters, postcards, wallet cards, and tip sheets) and educating the community on lethal means and what can be done to help prevent more suicides. This is being used in Lewis and Clark County and surrounding counties and working towards expanding to the rest of the state. This group also developed a toolkit for other communities regarding the steps to start up a similar Lethal Means Program.
- Continue to work with communities throughout the state networking with the local mental health facilities/providers, providing a variety of trainings and services available through the Mental Health Ombudsman Office.

## **FY2024 Mental Health Ombudsman Statistics at-a-glance** **(Inquiries)**



## **How We Help**

### **Coaching/Information**

Our first strategy to help someone resolve a problem is coaching. We try to give individuals enough information and confidence to address the problem themselves. We help to clarify the issue and to identify the resources available. Sometimes an individual is contacting us on behalf of a consumer. This includes mental health providers, such as a case manager, and family members. 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.

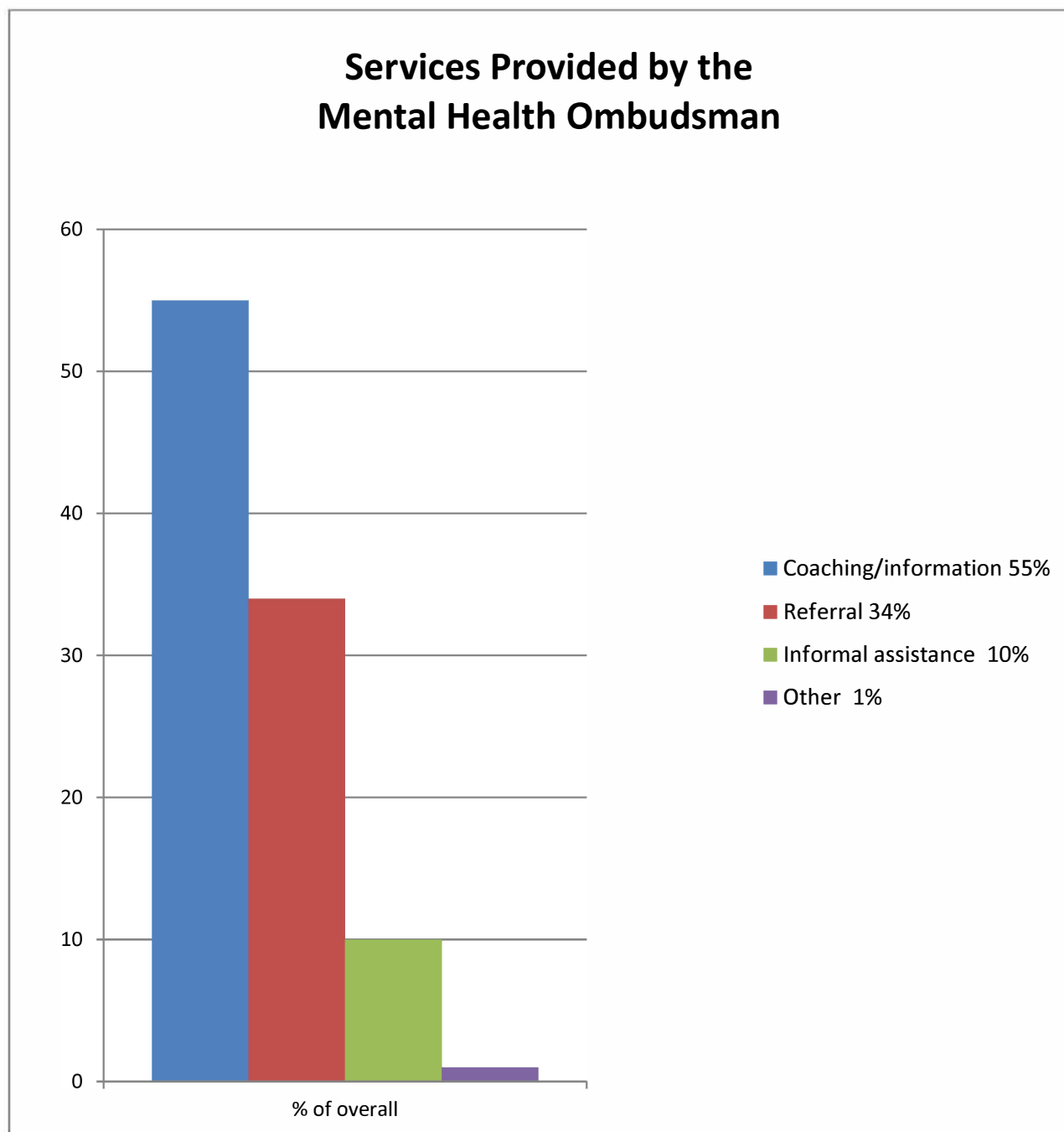
### **Informal Assistance**

Many individuals 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 individual to verify we have their permission to investigate or look into the issues/concerns more in-depth.

## **FY2024 Mental Health Ombudsman Statistics at-a-glance** **(Services Provided)**



## **Selected Cases**

### **Case #1**

The Mental Health Ombudsman was contacted by an individual who had concerns regarding a person who is currently in a county detention center and not receiving appropriate mental health treatment.

The Ombudsman Office had a lengthy discussion with the individual and it was determined that there were some concerns due to limited mental health services in the detention center. The Ombudsman Office contacted the detention center administration with the concerns, and they stated they would look into the concerns and contact the complainant with possible solutions.

### **Case #2**

The Mental Health Ombudsman received a call from another state agency, with an individual that had been making suicidal statements. The Ombudsman Office had the agency transfer the call so we could talk with the individual.

The Ombudsman Office talked with the individual for some time, getting the individual's name, phone number, and address during the conversation. After having the conversation, the individual explained he was unhappy with how he has been treated due to a clerical error on some paperwork, causing him to owe monies. The individual did not make any suicidal statements to the Ombudsman Office but was just very upset with the situation. The Ombudsman Office was able to de-escalate the situation and was able to get contact information to the individual to assist him with handling the complaint. The individual stated that he was doing a lot better and did not need any further assistance and thanked the office for assisting him.

### **Case #3**

An individual called the Mental Health Ombudsman asking for assistance as she tries to navigate her Medicaid and SDMI waiver. She stated she is having a hard time getting answers from the Medicaid Hotline. She stated her concern is not understanding what services are covered and what services aren't covered.

The Ombudsman Office contacted various agencies and left messages to see if we could get the right person to be able to assist the individual. The Ombudsman Office was finally able to contact the individual's case manager and explained the situation. The case manager stated they would look into the situation, contact the individual, and work on a solution.

## **MENTAL HEALTH OMBUDSMAN WORK PLAN FY2024**

*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 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 #3:**

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**

Montanans are still struggling with access to mental health services in the state. Many calls/concerns came up during this time regarding the status of continued mental health services throughout the state. With the Behavioral Health System for Future Generations (BHSFG) Commission recommendations, it needs to be a priority to continue to look for creative solutions that can provide quality, appropriate public mental health services for our state. The following are the recommendations from the Mental Health Ombudsman Office:

- ✓ With Montana being a rural (frontier) state, we need to continue to explore the evidence-based models that have been proven to work and apply them to our mental health services.
- ✓ Continue to expand in-state service options that can provide comprehensive, community-based, evidence-based, and recovery focused programs to both adults and children.
- ✓ Need to continue the support of Community-based Services:
  - Community integrated care
  - Community drop-in centers
  - Community-based suicide prevention training
  - Community crisis stabilization projects
- ✓ Increase capacity of providers to use wraparound services through training and funding opportunities.
- ✓ Ensure access to services for high-risk children with multi-agency needs and to be able to provide those services in our state.
- ✓ Develop long-term strategic planning protocols for children with developmental and mental disabilities that will continue through adulthood – helping with the transition between children's and adult services.