

Gov. Wolf: Office of Advocacy and Reform Announces Plan to Build a Trauma-Informed Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, PA – The Office of Advocacy and Reform (OAR), established by Governor Tom Wolf's 2019 [executive order](#) to protect Pennsylvania's vulnerable populations, today announced the launch of a volunteer think tank comprised of 25 experts representing a diversity of fields and backgrounds who will develop a plan to make Pennsylvania a trauma-informed state.

"The people of Pennsylvania are compassionate, thoughtful and resilient. We take care of each other, and that drive to protect our families and our neighbors has never been more obvious than these past few months as we've bonded together to fight COVID-19," said Gov. Wolf. "This group of experts, led by the Office of Advocacy and Reform, will build on this foundation to ensure that local and state government agencies use trauma-informed principles to guide all decisions that affect Pennsylvanians and that we continue to improve our systems that protect vulnerable populations. Thank you to these volunteers for their efforts to build a trauma-informed Pennsylvania."

As a companion to the governor's multi-agency effort and anti-stigma campaign, [Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters](#), aimed at expanding resources and the state's comprehensive support of mental health and related health care priorities in Pennsylvania, [OAR announced in January](#) that the agency was looking for a group of cutting-edge thinkers and practitioners in the field of trauma, and how the brain heals from its effects, to form a think tank.

The group will focus on setting guidelines, benchmarks, and goals for trauma-informed care across the commonwealth. In addition, the group is also expanding its original mandate to strategize how to heal the trauma that all Pennsylvanians are experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our work is more important than ever," said Dan Jurman, Executive Director of the Office of Advocacy and Reform. "Every Pennsylvanian is experiencing trauma and toxic stress right now, affecting the behavioral health of each and every one of us."

The 25 experts chosen to participate are from urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the commonwealth and represent the fields of psychiatry, psychology, law enforcement, county government, clergy, social work, counseling, mindfulness, community development, education, sexual assault recovery, addiction recovery, domestic violence services, child maltreatment solutions, nursing, public health, pediatric medicine, prison re-entry, and philanthropy.

"The diversity of experiences and perspectives represented in this group will be absolutely key to the success of our mission," Jurman said. "I'm grateful to everyone who raised their hand to help, and I look forward to working with this group on a plan that will make a positive difference in the lives of so many vulnerable Pennsylvanians."

The think tank will meet several times over the next few months to collaborate on setting trauma-informed standards that can guide the work of state agencies, as well as local government and nonprofit organizations across the commonwealth. When the first phase is completed, the members of the think tank who wish to continue serving will shift to an advisory role, helping OAR build a network of trauma-informed providers who learn from each other,

support pilots and innovation, share best practices, and push the initial guidelines even further over time as our understanding of brain science and trauma-informed approaches evolves and broadens.

Another 43 think tank applicants who weren't chosen to participate in this first phase of plan development have been invited to assist with building the statewide network.

OAR plans to make the resulting plan to transform Pennsylvania into a trauma-informed state public in July.

"This current crisis has shown us all how vulnerable we are," Jurman added, "This is our chance to eliminate stigma and misunderstanding and replace them with knowledge about how the brain works and empathy for each other to fundamentally change the way we approach trauma as a commonwealth."